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Kyle Chayka on the Internet's "new curators,"
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Inkoo Kang on Aasif Mandvi, and more.

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ROSE WONG

THE MAIL

ATTENTION SEEKING

The unexpected turn in Nathan Heller's piece—from an exploration of the science behind our dwindling attention spans to an account of the Order of the Third Bird, an enigmatic community of people who practice collective attention—was a delightful one ("The Battle for Attention," May 6th). Also delightful was my recognition that the four movements of the Order's Standard Protocol—Encounter, Attending, Negation, and Realizing—echo the phases of the Benedictine monastic practice of Lectio Divina, or Divine Reading: Lectio, Meditatio, Oratio, and Contemplatio. The suspension of interpretation and judgment during a Third Bird "action" is similar to the approach of Lectio Divina, in which one encounters a scriptural text and experiences it without attempting to draw meaning from it. It is only during the third and fourth movements of Lectio Divina that one shifts into possible action (such as prayer), similar to the Birds' Realizing phase, in which, say, members determine that a painting should be moved to another wall. I wondered if the Order's founders were inspired by Lectio Divina, or if this four-movement practice is something so essentially human that it finds expression in various traditions across the centuries.

Jamie Quatro
Chattanooga, Tenn.

I thought it was unfortunate that Heller chose to focus his story about overcoming the churn of the attention economy on the Order of the Third Bird. Although one "Bird" he interviews insists, without evidence, that the group is "really old," its paper trail only begins in 2010, as Heller notes. I found the group's initiation rites and choreographed actions to be mostly silly, if not cringeworthy. As an art historian, I struggle to achieve and maintain the quality of attention that each work of art demands; I try not to mistake myself for the object of study. Far from harking back to a pre-social-media era of attentive contemplation, the Birds embody the narcissistic gaze of the front-facing camera.

Rachel Federman
White Plains, N.Y.

EATING ANIMALS

In his review of several recent books on animal rights, Kelefa Sanneh explores the question of whether speciesism and anthropocentrism are world views that contribute to the suffering of animals at the hands of human beings (Books, May 6th). Of note is the fact that some extreme animal-rights advocates believe that an anthropocentric viewpoint is actually necessary to reduce animal suffering. Brian Tomasik, for example, lays out a manifesto of sorts for a small but vocal community of animal-rights activists who believe that humans have an obligation to reduce what he calls "wild animal suffering" or "suffering in nature." Tomasik argues that the experience of prey species (such as small fish, rodents, and insects) is primarily one of anguish, and that ending their suffering should be a central goal of animal-rights movements. Furthermore, this community posits that the end of predation in the wild should be accomplished by human intervention; their proposed solutions include air-dropping vegan meat substitutes to predators like lions.

Personally, I try to distance myself from anthropocentric thought (even if I frequently fail). Humans, like all animals, are part of a larger ecosystem that is built upon predation and death. I think we can acknowledge this reality while also advocating for the well-being of the animals whose lives we impact.

Josie Wakerobin
Deerfield, Mass.

•

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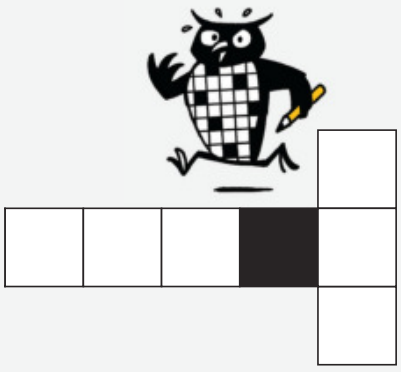

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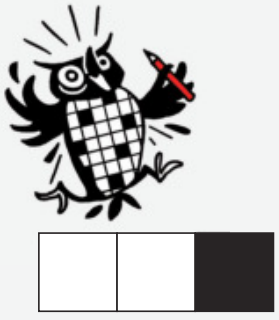

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GOINGS ON

MAY 29 – JUNE 4, 2024

What we're watching, listening to, and doing this week.

This summer, the programming at Little Island, the floating park on the Hudson, is showing more ambition, with nine high-profile premières. The first, kicking off on June 1, comes courtesy of **Twyla Tharp,** whose recent work has leaned to the jokey side, though she retains a nearly supernatural ability to draw the best from dancers. "How Long Blues" has a live score, by the roots-music experts T Bone Burnett and David Mansfield, and a cast that mixes Tharp regulars with the likes of the Broadway leading man Michael Cerveris. Other than that, all Tharp will share of the work is that it's an epic narrative about resilience and is inspired by Camus.—*Brian Seibert*

ABOUT TOWN

PODCASTS | **"White Devil,"** a provocative new series from Campside Media, hosted by Josh Dean, explores the aftermath of a 2021 killing in Belize which made international headlines: the shooting of a senior police officer, Henry Jemmott, by Jasmine Hartin, a Canadian property developer connected to one of the most powerful families in the country. The series isn't true crime; if anything, the shooting itself, apparently an accident, gets short shrift. Where "White Devil" excels is in using Hartin's overnight reversal of fortune to examine power and corruption in postcolonial Belize, whose status as getaway and tax haven for wealthy foreigners makes life perilous for everybody else. The show zooms in on Hartin's former de-facto father-in-law, the British Belizean business magnate Lord Michael Ashcroft, a Tory-supporting, heroism-medal-collecting billionaire, whose local nickname gives the series its title.—*Sarah Larson*

OFF BROADWAY | Dave Malloy's pandemic-isolation-era sad-cabaret **"Three Houses"** takes the form of three monodramas, sung by participants at a kind of supernatural open-mike night, the songs delivered in a quasi-operatic oom-pah-pah recitative. Each section starts the same way: a breakup, then lockdown and a retreat to an otherwise empty refuge, where mental cohesion frays. A small ensemble expands on the soloists' fantasies, bringing to life a dead grandma's ghost (Ching Valdes-Aran), or a spider (Margo Seibert) that harasses an increasingly paranoid man (J. D. Mollison), or the metaphorical wolf (Scott Stangland) who tries to blow all the little houses down. The director, Annie Tippe, emphasizes these whimsical elements to warm the evening, but Malloy's existential horror—and a drumbeat of self-accusation—chills every second of the show's hundred difficult minutes.—*Helen Shaw (Pershing Square Signature Theatre; through June 9.)*

INDIE POP | The Athens, Georgia-born band **of Montreal** has experienced many iterations, all of which revolve around the singer-songwriter and multi-instrumentalist Kevin Barnes. Across nineteen albums, starting in the mid-nineties, the band's mercurial indie-pop sound has shifted from the zippy psychedelia of such LPs as "The Gay Parade" and "Satanic Panic in the Attic" to the electronic-forward synth pop of its recent outings, particularly "UR FUN" (2020). Its latest album, "Lady on the Cusp," marks the end of an era: it's the last record that Barnes made while living in Georgia. Fittingly, the record's wheezing tunes are a disorienting jumble of many previous modes. The band plays from the entire catalogue at shows, but Barnes has said that they prefer doing new songs—only then are the crowd's reactions truly a surprise.—*Sheldon Pearce (Elsewhere; June 4.)*

DANCE | Like so many institutions founded by towering cultural figures, **Alvin Ailey American Dance Theatre** now has a split personality. On the one hand, it serves as a repository for Ailey's beloved dances, first among them the always thrilling "Revelations." But a company can't live on its past alone, and that's where commissions come in. A weeklong run at BAM offers both facets. In one of two programs, the impressive, generous Ailey dancers take on the poetic "Ode," by Jamar Roberts, a meditation on death and transfiguration from 2019, and Alonzo King's fluid, meditative 2000 work "Following the Subtle Current Upstream." The other is all Ailey, including the powerful hymn to womanhood "Cry" and, yes, "Revelations."—*Marina Harss (Howard Gilman Opera House; June 4-9.)*

OFF BROADWAY | In Raja Feather Kelly's melancholy **"The Fires,"** three generations of Black men occupy the same apartment at three different times: we see them in 1974, when Jay (Phillip James Brannon) composes an allegorical text about Aphrodite, as his lover, George (Ronald Peet), tends to him; in 1998, when Sam (Sheldon Best) searches Jay's and George's notebooks for clues about his own father's recent suicide; and in 2021, when Eli (Beau Badu) sequesters himself in the apartment during the pandemic, reading the notebooks as a friend (Jason Veasey) badgers him into attempting a meaningful connection. Feather Kelly's long experience as a choreographer has made him comfortable with iteration, and this shapes his deliberately repetitive, looping dialogues about sorrow and sex. Strangely, his direction of actors, rather than language, is less controlled—though his interest in physical languor does create a certain hypnotic, aching lassitude onstage.—*H.S. (Soho Rep; through June 16.)*

MOVIES | Nanni Moretti, a master of cinematic autofiction, returns boldly to the form with **"A Brighter Tomorrow,"** in Film at Lincoln Center's "Open Roads" series of new Italian films. Moretti, now seventy, builds his political and artistic passions into his role as Giovanni, an Italian director who is making a historical drama, set in 1956, about a Hungarian circus troupe stranded in Rome among Italian Communist hosts. Meanwhile, Giovanni's marriage to a producer (Margherita Buy) is coming apart. Moretti gleefully unleashes intricate narrative maneuvers while scathingly satirizing the movie business. Giovanni's film coalesces both with his intimate life and with his romantic vision, which is put on scintillating display when he sees a young couple in the street and directs their lovers' dialogue.—*Richard Brody (June 1 and June 5.)*

ILLUSTRATION BY MANDDY WYCKENS

TABLES FOR TWO

Penny
90 E. 10th St.

I love to watch an oyster get shucked—the heft of a calciferous shell in a steady hand, the sweep and pop of the knife, the liquor-slick shine of the reveal—and Penny, a stylish new seafood bar in the East Village, has a polished, understated swagger that somehow seems to make the oysters even better. It's the same sort of alchemy that made late restaurants like the John Dory Oyster Bar and Pearl Oyster Bar such perfect places to slip in after work, or for a lingering lunch, to slurp down a dozen and feel a little bit more alive. Penny is owned by the restaurateur Chase Sinzer and the chef Joshua Pinsky, and is situated just upstairs from Claud, its sister restaurant, a slinky little bistro that's been a hit since its opening, in 2022. Where Claud is warm and sexy, Penny is sleek and sharp, all white and steel and marble.

The mood, though, is welcoming and casual; there are no tables, just a long row of seats set before the room's infinite-seeming raw bar, behind which an army of shuckers and slicers reach into shapely wall-mounted troughs for a needed mollusk or crustacean. The best way to take in the bounty is by ordering the Ice Box Plus ($98), a gloriously over-the-top tray of seafood that, on my visits, bore brawny oysters, scallop crudo, plump smoked mussels, tiny periwinkles, a huge scoop of Jonah crab, and a tangle of vividly pink cocktail shrimp. Most thrilling were two shot-glass-size portions of vichyssoise dolloped upon arrival with voluptuous portions of caviar, green-gold and sublime. It's not cheap eats, by any stretch, but it's the sort of thing that makes money feel well spent.

At Claud, Pinsky has displayed an aptitude for applying heat to marine creatures (the barely cooked shrimp in his *gambas al ajillo* are fantastic), and at Penny an all-seafood conceit gives him even more room to explore. Oysters are confited in chicken fat until sumptuously rich. Squid stuffed with tuna and Swiss chard is charred to a tender, near-caramel sweetness. Dover sole arrives in a thick hunk topped with wobbly bits of bone marrow and drizzled in Bordelaise sauce. A considerable portion of the room is reserved for walk-ins, which gives the well-orchestrated operation a glittering edge of spontaneity. It might be tempting to try to have appetizers at Penny and finish the evening downstairs at Claud, but it would be something of a miracle to get into both in the same evening—and, more to the point, why would you want to leave? Just as Claud has its showstopper dessert—a gargantuan slice of chocolate cake—so, too, does Penny. A tidy serving of chocolate mousse, splashed with grassy olive oil and crowned with hazelnuts, it's dense and smooth, deep and sweet—a plate of pure, relaxed luxury. *(Dishes $8–$98.)*

—Helen Rosner

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PICK THREE

The staff writer Inkoo Kang on what to watch.

1. THE PRESTIGE SHOW: With its third season, **"Hacks"** (Max) makes a feast out of beef. The boomer-meets-zoomer dramedy—about a once legendary comic, Deborah Vance (Jean Smart), attempting a comeback and her scrappy joke writer, Ava (Hannah Einbinder), coaxing her into uncomfortable new places—has skillfully guided its central duo to a slow but delicious face-off. As Deborah schemes to, finally, host a late-night show, the question of whether she can mature enough to see her protégée as an equal builds toward some of the series' best moments yet.

2. THE COMFORT SHOW: In **"Elsbeth"** (CBS), a second spinoff of "The Good Wife," Carrie Preston reprises her role as a ditzy legal savant, who moves from Chicago to Manhattan ostensibly to monitor the N.Y.P.D. But Elsbeth spends most of her time solving homicides, which, taken together, depict a glittery metropolis teeming with entitled, well-heeled killers, played by a murderer's row of character actors, who satisfyingly get their comeuppance.

3. THE WHAT-THE-HELL-AM-I-WATCHING SHOW: On Paramount+, the "Good Wife" creators, Robert and Michelle King, let their freak flag fly with **"Evil,"** a case-of-the-week procedural that has perfected Catholic horror-camp. A priest (Mike Colter), a psychologist (Katja Herbers), and a debunker (Aasif Mandvi) walk into, well, usually a house in need of an exorcism. The show is riotous, but its greatest strengths are its knowing outlandishness and its tech-centric story lines. What better way for a demon to crush one's soul than by urging a person to spend too much time online?

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THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT
TURNING POINTS

Vovchansk is a small Ukrainian town that sits just three miles from the border with Russia. Dotted with farmland and Soviet-era factories, it carries the memory of successive invasions and occupations. During the Second World War, as the Wehrmacht and the Red Army fought relentlessly in and around nearby Kharkiv—control of that city changed hands four times—Vovchansk was occupied by Nazi forces for more than a year. Today, two years into Russia's war in Ukraine, as the Russian military has managed to shift momentum in its favor, the town is again at the center of decisive battles.

The story of Vovchansk's present-day occupation began on the first day of the invasion, in February, 2022, when Russian units streamed across the border. They took the town without much of a fight, but they were eventually worn down by insufficient troop numbers, disorganized command, and a lack of air and artillery power. That September, Ukraine mounted a surprise counteroffensive, leading Russian forces to retreat from Vovchansk and dozens of other towns in the Kharkiv region.

On May 10th of this year, with the war in a very different phase, Russia attacked again. The so-called "meat storm," in which wave after wave of foot soldiers are sent into the line of fire—Western intelligence services estimate that the total number of Russian dead and wounded has surpassed half a million—remains a grim hallmark of Russian operations, but the military has adapted. The Kremlin has replenished the armed forces by way of a military draft and financial incentives, recruiting as many as thirty thousand new soldiers every month, and is spending a third of the national budget on defense and security. According to NATO estimates, Russia produces three million artillery shells per year—more than double the number that all NATO member states combined can provide Ukraine. The Russian Army has become adept at using drones and electronic countermeasures to stymie Ukraine's own battlefield innovations, and the Air Force has retrofitted Soviet-era one-and-a-half-ton unguided "dumb" bombs with wings and G.P.S. navigation to create "glide bombs," which are used to level troop formations and entire city blocks alike.

Meanwhile, Ukraine is facing perhaps its toughest moment yet in the war. For months, recalcitrant Republicans in Congress blocked the passage of a new aid package, and Ukrainian stocks of everything from anti-aircraft missiles to artillery shells grew scarce. Ukrainian commanders estimate that Russian forces now have a ten-to-one advantage in artillery rounds. With air defenses depleted, Ukrainian cities—Kharkiv most of all—endured the most sustained assaults since the war began. Missile strikes knocked out power grids across the country. In late April, Congress finally approved a sixty-one-billion-dollar arms package, but the war's momentum had already turned, and, in any case, heavy-weapons systems and armaments can't reach the battlefield overnight. Last week, for the first time, the government in Kyiv ordered nationwide blackouts.

But a lack of arms is only one of Ukraine's problems; the military is also short on soldiers. In the early days of the war, there was no shortage of people looking to sign up to fight, but finding eager recruits has become far more difficult. Discontent is rising as the draft affects mostly those who tend to bear the brunt of fighting in any war: people from more rural regions, the less educated, the relatively less well off. President Volodymyr Zelensky had no ready solution to this dilemma, and the parliament failed to pass a mobilization law for more than a year. Last month, Zelensky finally signed a series of laws expanding the draft and, his administration argues, making it more transparent and efficient. But there is still no process for demobilizing troops, so those who are called up fear that they are being handed a one-way ticket—not an attractive prospect in a grinding war of

ILLUSTRATIONS BY JOÃO FAZENDA

attrition that, according to U.S. intelligence, has killed seventy thousand Ukrainian soldiers. And, as with the long-delayed influx of U.S. arms, the new laws will take time to change the reality on the battlefield.

It was within this window of opportunity that Russia launched its current offensive. Fighting continues in the streets of Vovchansk, as Ukrainian commanders speak euphemistically of units that have "moved to more advantageous positions, as a consequence of enemy fire and storming action," and less euphemistically of a Russian "tactical success." Russia's incursion is what's known in military parlance as a "fixing" operation—a way to tie down forces in one area of fighting to create advantage in another. Vladimir Putin's immediate priority remains the capture of the entirety of the Donbas region, in eastern Ukraine.

When Putin's initial war aims—the sacking of Kyiv and the overthrow of Zelensky—failed in the invasion's early days, it seemed as if a prolonged war would favor Ukraine. Zelensky didn't flee. The Russian Army was in disarray. The West proved more united than Putin imagined. But that logic reversed long ago. Even with a year's worth of U.S. weapons on the way, Ukraine cannot count on future aid packages, particularly if Donald Trump becomes President again. And for all the talk in Washington and in European capitals of the existential nature of the fight, they have not used the past two years to seriously upgrade or expand arms production.

The Biden Administration, out of fear of escalation, prohibits U.S. weapons from being used against targets in sovereign Russian territory. (Last week, Russia staged drills near the border, simulating the use of tactical nuclear weapons.) But, Ukrainian officials argue, that is where Russia is now launching its strikes. Zelensky thinks that Putin's nuclear posturing is essentially just that, and in a recent interview with the *Times* he said that Russian forces "proceed calmly, understanding that our partners do not give us permission" to use Western weapons to hit back.

If Vovchansk falls, Russian artillery will again be within firing distance of Kharkiv. The campaign to render Ukraine's second-largest city—with a prewar population of 1.5 million people, the size of Amsterdam—functionally uninhabitable would gain force. Putin has indicated he believes that if Russia applies enough pressure, destruction, and misery, the West will end its support of Ukraine, which would lead to political change in Kyiv, with Zelensky replaced by figures sympathetic to Moscow. But that outcome is not inevitable. As the story of Vovchansk shows, the trajectories of wars can change many times.

—Joshua Yaffa

IN THE *STREETS*
AMONG THE HATS

At former President Donald Trump's rally in Crotona Park, in the Bronx, last week—his first rally in the city in eight years—his fans seemed to have a wonderful time. So many flags! Some supporters were so bedecked in them, they almost trailed on the ground. And such dreadful T-shirts referring to President Joe Biden and Vice-President Kamala Harris—what a thrill to wear them in public for all to see! Two hours before the event, the line waiting to get into the speaking venue in the southeast corner of the park stretched far down Crotona Park East; it didn't move for more than an hour. The hats waited, chatting, laughing, sometimes shouting, while venders working the line yelled, "Don't be a Democrat—get you a Trump hat!"

Under the hats were people of many kinds: blond Trump fans, more than a few huge white guys ("Hey, bro—you got that T-shirt in XXL?"), and many red-hatted Black and brown Trump supporters. Wearing less Trump regalia were Asian men in jackets and ties, a few women in hijabs, and scores of Hasidic men in white shirts, black trousers, and black yarmulkes. A beetle-browed guy in a pullover said to two young Hasidim, "You guys gotta tell the Hasidim to get together!" They listened, nodding.

Pollen blew through the balmy air, the sun declined through the trees. Six o'clock, the hour when Trump was supposed to speak, approached. At the park's edges, cops hooked their thumbs in the armholes of their fluorescent vests and stood back on their heels. A helicopter made its thwapping noise as it held, unmoving, at eagle altitude overhead. The line began to move. The speaking venue quickly filled up and overflowed, spilling into a large area of grass and rock outcroppings. A group appeared near the overflow area carrying a banner that called both Trump and Biden fascists. Behind it, a speaker with a bullhorn shouted, "'Make America Great Again'? When was America *ever* great?" On one of the knolls, another group chanted "Fuck. Trump! Fuck. Biden! They. Don't. Care-about-you!" A red hat shouted at them: "My father fought for this country! My father's corpse is screaming at you from the grave!"

A paved lane divided the pro-Trump overflow from a knot of anti-Trump, anti-Biden, pro-Palestinian protesters. Standing on the lane, a man named Milton Perez asked another man if he was for Trump. The man replied that he was a reporter. Perez said that he was nonpolitical, but found it insulting that Trump had come here. "I was born in the Bronx, but I live in Brooklyn and I'm an advocate for the homeless. I was invited to the State of the Union address, and when I looked out at the Republicans all sitting together

they were ninety-five per cent white men in suits. Across the aisle, the Democrats looked more diverse. They looked like they might at least listen to you." Dinick Martinez, his friend, pointed at the pro-Palestinian group and said, "I feel sorry for the trans kids on that side. They don't know that Hamas would kill them, too. I'm unrestricted, myself, and honestly I feel more comfortable with them," gesturing to the bigger crowd on the Trump side of the lane.

Ever since the line started forming, a woman with a sign that said "Warning: Trump Hates You" and (on the other side) "Warning: Trump Is a Nazi," accented with a red swastika, had stood among the Trump fans and tried to tell them why she thinks Trump is corrupt. She had medium-length brown hair and wore glasses and a dress decorated with pink and black flowers. Trump fans yelled at her and sometimes shook their fingers in her face. One kept shouting, "Arrest her! Arrest her!" She smiled pleasantly and listened, offering counter-arguments. After Trump had been speaking (mostly inaudibly, at this distance) for an hour, she left the overflow area, putting her sign, in pieces, into a large plastic bag. The reporter approached her and said, "Your sign broke."

"Somebody punched it," she said. "There were some not-nice people today. But some people were nice, and willing to talk. I've been doing this at Trump rallies since 2016, ever since he came down the escalator. I don't know how many people I've persuaded—today, probably nobody. What surprises me is how many people say they would never vote for Biden because he is a pedophile. A good fifty per cent of the Trump supporters I've talked to say that. I think that as a country we have become unable to tell good from evil."

She continued, "I do feel bad about the 'Trump Is a Nazi' sign, and the swastika. I thought I needed a strong statement to get people's attention, but some Jewish Trump supporters today told me that I don't know anything about the Nazis or the Holocaust. Looking back, I felt it was wrong when I was drawing the swastika. Next time, I'll tone it down."

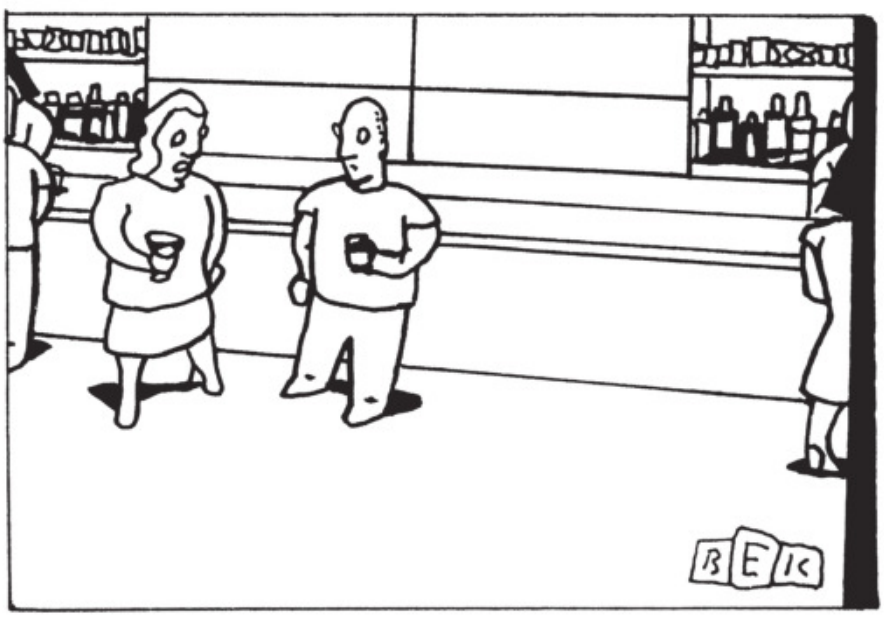
—Ian Frazier

ON CAMPUS
THE PEOPLE'S GRADUATION

In the spring of 1968, after a series of antiwar demonstrations and a police raid on Columbia's campus, protesters ended the semester with a "counter-commencement." "WHILE COLUMBIA DANCES ITS OBSCENE CEREMONY," a flyer read, "WE WILL OPEN A LIBERATION SCHOOL FOR ALL PEOPLE." At the Cathedral of St. John the Divine, the historian Richard Hofstadter gave the official commencement address; hundreds of students walked out in protest and marched a few blocks north to an alternative graduation ceremony, where the writer Dwight Macdonald and others delivered remarks on the library steps. "While I find your strike and your sit-ins productive, I don't think these tactics can be used indefinitely without doing more damage than good to the university," Macdonald said.

This spring, during another series of antiwar demonstrations and student arrests at Columbia, a group of sympathetic faculty and staff organized another counter-commencement. "We looked through the historical archives for inspiration," Manu Karuka, a professor of American studies at Barnard, said. "We even used a font reminiscent of the '68 program." The 2024 program featured a drawing of a red poppy, a symbol of Palestinian resistance, above the words "The People's Graduation: A Gathering for Peace and Justice." A supplementary handout included a list of Barnard's "distrustees," along with top Columbia administrators and their e-mail addresses, and an acknowledgment in fine print: "This shitshow would not have been possible without these cruel and incompetent people."

The locations were flipped this year. The counter-commencement was held at St. John the Divine, whose clergy had offered it to the university community as a sanctuary. (Columbia's main graduation was supposed to take place in the middle of campus, until, at the last minute, it was cancelled.) Ilan Cohen, who was graduating with a dual degree from Columbia and the Jewish Theological Seminary, started the day at a small J.T.S. ceremony, where attendees sang both the American and the Israeli national anthems and Wolf Blitzer gave the commencement speech ("You stand at a crossroads in American history, and Jewish history"). Afterward, Cohen, who had participated in the student encampment, walked briskly toward the



"First it was an Instagram account, then a book, then a TV show, then a dictator."

cathedral, wearing a robin's-egg-blue robe and a beet-red yarmulke. He carried three pins—"Columbia Jews for Ceasefire," "JTS Jews for Ceasefire," and "Not in My Name"—and deliberated over which to wear. "No pins, I'm sorry," a volunteer usher said. "Church rules." The rules did not extend to posters, banners, or slogans on mortarboards ("Free Palestine"; "Student Intifada"; "Glory to the Class of 2024 of Gaza"). Someone handed Cohen a parody newspaper called the New York *War Crimes*—the "Nabka Day Edition" ("All the Consent That's Fit to Manufacture"). As Cohen looked for a seat, he ran into Frank Guridy, a history professor with whom he had taken a course called Columbia 1968. They posed for a photo, and Guridy asked about Cohen's plans. "Haven't had a second to think about it," he said.

The actress and comedian Amanda Seales, a Columbia alum, was the m.c. "Today, in the spirit of 1968, we gather in what gentrifiers call Morningside Heights but the real ones know is *Harlem*," she began. A full cathedral—a few dozen faculty and special guests onstage, a few hundred students in the pews—cheered. Seales introduced Randa Jarrar, a Palestinian American writer and activist. "In 1799, Napoleon invaded Palestine," Jarrar said, then led the audience in a chant: "We defeated Napoleon!" "We are defeating Israel!" "We defeated Columbia!" "We are dismantling this empire!" A Palestinian American poet named Fady Joudah read a poem called "Dedication," fighting back tears; Noura Erakat, a human-rights lawyer, told the students, "You have taught us well—in your sacrifice, in your courage, in your ingenuity." A few backpack-wearing cathedral tourists took photos in chastened silence, then quickly left.

To close out the ceremony, Seales introduced a band called the Liberated Zone, "a ragtag collective of musically inclined radicals, scholars, and truth-tellers who met while jamming at the Gaza Solidarity Encampment." Six musicians, half of them barefoot, performed a two-chord folk song based on a verse from the Book of Ruth. Then the grads marched out, applauded by faculty waiting on the steps. Clumps of students stood chatting about summer plans and upcoming disciplinary hearings, or breaking into brief chants ("Disclose! Divest! We will not stop, we will not rest"). A Barnard professor invited Cohen to join her protest singing group, Voices of Witness. Cohen had been part of a "pluralistic Jewish a-cappella group," he said, "and this was the year we really had to figure out what pluralism meant."

"How'd that go?" the professor asked.

"Well," Cohen said, "we just had to appoint two students to be mediators next year, if that gives you an idea."

—Andrew Marantz

THE BOARDS
NOODLING

Music history is full of object lessons in the perils—and the necessity—of perfectionism. The 1977 album "Rumours" was both Fleetwood Mac's magnum opus and its undoing. The record was an inspiration for David Adjmi, the playwright behind "Stereophonic," which follows a rock band over a full year spent fine-tuning the songs that will cement their fame and decimate their relationships. Peter (Tom Pecinka) is the headstrong guitarist; Diana (Sarah Pidgeon), his on-again, off-again girlfriend, is a singer coming into her own. The keyboardist, Holly (Juliana Canfield), and the bassist, Reg (Will Brill), are in a tempestuous marriage, with the drummer, Simon (Chris Stack), as an imperfect mediator. Two sound engineers, Grover (Eli Gelb) and Charlie (Andrew R. Butler), act as referees, hype men, and, occasionally, therapists.

Justin Craig, Will Butler, and Sarah Pidgeon

Adjmi set the story in 1976 and enlisted Will Butler, lately of Arcade Fire, to write the music. It wasn't enough for it to be period-appropriate; it had to be narratively apt, too—composed with an ear for the guitar riff that could expose a guy's ego or the high note that pushes a soloist to her breaking point. Butler and Adjmi spent nearly a decade tinkering before "Stereophonic" premièred, in 2023. This spring, it transferred to Broadway, where it earned thirteen Tony nominations.

Recently, the actors met up at a studio in Brooklyn to record the cast album. Their process was less fraught than their fictional counterparts'. "That was really vibe-y," Will Butler said, encouragingly, at the end of a take. He tapped his sandaled feet, instructed the cast to "noodle," and took notes on the results. When Pecinka apologized for a wobbly performance, Butler said, "Some of the stuff where you fucked up sounds like fuckin' Tom Petty!"

Gelb, who has dark, curly hair, sat on a couch. "It's helpful to be here—you'll get little nuggets," he said. He'd picked up tiny gestures and terms of art that informed his character by watching Butler and the show's music director, Justin Craig, at work. "It's also just good to be part of the hang-age."

Andrew Butler chimed in: "We're the fictional band's engineers, but the real band's entourage."

Someone mentioned "D.I.," and Gelb rushed to demonstrate his new knowledge. "That stands for 'direct injection,'" he said. "Straight signal from the guitar. The amp has a different quality."

None of the actors are professional musicians. Before the show opened at Playwrights Horizons, they had just seven weeks of rehearsal to get to grips with their instruments. The first half of each day was devoted to band practice. The engineers would arrive in the afternoon to find the cast mid-jam session, disco lights on, the composer leaping up and down in excitement.

The energy in the studio was similarly jovial, even when a debate broke out over the distinction between "ohh" and "ooh." Later, mirroring Pidgeon's "vowel sounds" became a challenge.

"'Disappea-yuh'—why did I *say* it like that?" she asked.

"Is that a Michigan thing?"

"I don't know *what* it is."

After a break, Craig turned to Pidgeon, who had on layered T-shirts and wide-legged trousers. Like the others, she was in her socks, to minimize errant noise. The night before, Craig had stitched together his favorite takes of "Bright," her character's breakout song, and he wanted to play it for her.

"This might be it," Will Butler said. "If it's *not*, we could do it at, like, 9 P.M., and you could lie on a carpet."

"I like *that* vibe," Pidgeon said. She closed her eyes as she listened to her own performance: "You've been singing / In your sleep again / But the words come out all cluttered."

"I sound a little timid," she said. "I kind of want to—I don't know . . ."

"Go full witch?" Butler offered.

"Yeah!" she said. "Maybe it's the version on the ground. Like she's had two glasses of wine and she's trying to sing."

"It's a work in progress," Craig said.

Canfield headed to the booth to record backing vocals. "Lady Di, let me know what you think!"

Pidgeon smiled. "I'm gonna love it."

Canfield whooped, then burst out laughing. "Fuck! I got excited, but I fucked it up." She slipped into character. "I'll do it right this time," she said. "Where's the Courvoisier?"

—Alex Barasch

FOLLOW THE MONEY
DEMOCRATIZED

The old adage about investing is that, unless you are, say, Warren Buffett, you can't beat the market. But that's not strictly true. Many members of Congress post excellent earnings. Consider Brian Higgins, the former Democratic congressman from New York, who quit in February: his portfolio went up 238.9 per cent in 2023. Three Republicans—Mark Green, Garret Graves, and David Rouzer—more than doubled their money. (Trading individual stocks is legal for Congress members; trading on inside info isn't, but prosecutions are rare.) Some have demonstrated exquisite timing. Just before the pandemic, Richard Burr, the chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee at the time, sold off as much as $1.7 million in stocks. Two weeks later, the market tanked.

Not long afterward, Chris Josephs and a few friends started a social-media app called Iris, focussed on stock-market transactions for the casual investor. But its users weren't impressed with one another's returns. "Everyone kept demanding, 'I want to trade what Nancy Pelosi trades,'" Josephs said recently. The Iris team came up with Autopilot, a choose-your-own-money-manager app. One of the most popular features is the Pelosi Tracker, which allows users to copy the top ten stock picks made by Nancy Pelosi's husband, Paul. Your portfolio buys when he buys and sells when he sells—as soon as she reports the trades, within the forty-five days required by law. The tracker was up forty-five per cent last year. (A spokesman for Pelosi said that she doesn't own any stocks and isn't involved in any of her husband's transactions.) Other portfolios offered by Autopilot: Buffett (up ten per cent), Bill Ackman (up eighteen), and Representative Dan Crenshaw, of Texas (up forty-one).

On a recent morning, Josephs, who is twenty-eight, was stuck in Los Angeles traffic in a black Lexus, on his way to the Autopilot offices, in Irvine. He had on an Autopilot-branded trucker hat, a sea-green crewneck, cargo pants, and white Pumas. He considered whose portfolio to launch next. "People are asking for Tuberville," he said, referring to the Republican senator from Alabama. "We could do Markwayne Mullin, because he's an interesting guy."

At a standstill, Josephs pulled up a video he'd edited the night before. Mullin, a Republican senator from Oklahoma, had bought as much as fifty thousand dollars' worth of Raytheon stock in September, Josephs says in the video: "And it was suspicious, because not only does he sit on the Senate Armed Services Committee but also because his buy was literally just two weeks before Hamas launched their deadly terrorist attack." (It was slightly more than three.) He posted the video on the company's Instagram, @politiciantradetracker, which has six hundred thousand followers. "Raytheon is literally the company that builds the Iron Dome," he said. Mullin was up thirty-three per cent. (A spokesperson for Mullin said that he uses an "independent third-party" firm to manage his portfolio.)

At the office, Josephs pitched the Mullin portfolio to his co-founder Brian Schardt. "I would say we add another Republican, another Democrat," Schardt said. "We gotta keep it even."

"We just want to follow the money," Josephs said. He perused his notifications. Tens of thousands of people had seen the Mullin video. "You're a modern patriot, thank you," one commented. Josephs played a clip of Tucker Carlson talking with Tulsi Gabbard, who praised the Pelosi Tracker. "I've got to reach out to Tulsi's team," he said.

According to Josephs, the point of the app isn't solely profit—the Autopilot motto: "If you can't beat 'em, join 'em"—but also getting politicians banned from trading stocks. "I'd be very fine with this going away tomorrow," he said. "We'd just figure out the next thing to do." Is change on the way? Josephs brought up Matt Gaetz, the grandstanding Republican congressman from Florida. "He has a bill with A.O.C. to ban it."

Around noon, Josephs met his partners in a conference room to discuss the next launch. "This man, Markwayne Mullin, is making a ton of trades," he said. A TV screen showed his filings—fifty thousand dollars here, a hundred thousand there. "See, this guy's perfect," Josephs said. "Makes headlines, pretty controversial, Republican, so it's not full Democrat." He played a clip of Mullin at a hearing in November, challenging the Teamsters' boss to a fight ("Well, stand your butt up, then"). "So we use that video to drop it, put some music behind it, like Avicii," Josephs said.

Lawyers had advised the Autopilot team to explain how they chose the stocks; they picked Mullin's fifteen largest holdings by value, then by market cap. Josephs typed his positions—semiconductors, pharma, Big Tech—into a spreadsheet. "He seems to be well diversified," Josephs said. Then he noticed shares of Palo Alto Networks, a cybersecurity company with several federal contracts. He laughed: "Same as Pelosi!"

—Jack Truesdale

ONWARD AND UPWARD WITH THE ARTS

SHOWSTOPPERS

A Tony-winning musical director faces her first Broadway miss.

BY RACHEL SYME

Rachel Chavkin directed the hit "Hadestown" and the short-lived "Lempicka."

At Joe Allen, a restaurant on Forty-sixth Street where denizens of the theatre world have been convening for nearly six decades, the walls are lined with posters of Broadway's legendary duds. In the early days, for a show to make the display, it had to close in less than a week. Qualifying flops included such productions as "Drat! The Cat!," a sex farce about a Victorian cat burglar (eight performances), and "Via Galactica," a seventies rock opera about a trash collector who lives on an asteroid (seven performances). Joe Allen specializes in comfort food—burgers, banana cream pie—and there is something oddly comforting, too, about its morbid choice of décor. No single misfire stands alone; failure is its own kind of rite of passage, to be commemorated along with success. The first poster that the restaurant ever hung, in 1965, was for "Kelly," about a man who jumps off the Brooklyn Bridge and survives. The show was such a fiasco that the writers sued the producers even before it premièred; it opened and closed on the same day.

Not all unsuccessful shows, however, are spectacular implosions or paragons of bad taste. There is another, more common, type of Broadway misfire that is less dramatic but perhaps more disappointing—a production that has many things going for it, with a closely collaborative team working furiously until the last moment, never losing faith that it will find an audience. Instead of crashing and burning, it opens and sputters. Some diehard fans adore it, but it becomes apparent—after the first reviews appear and then, more clearly, after the Tony nominations—that the show cannot sustain itself. Maybe it was bad timing. Maybe it was bad advertising. Maybe it was the whims of the marketplace. Maybe, if the show had only had a few more weeks of rehearsals, its admirable but unhoned elements might have slid into place.

"Lempicka," which opened on Broadway on April 14th and closed on May 19th, after forty-one performances, was one of that type. Created by the playwright Carson Kreitzer and the composer Matt Gould, both Broadway first-timers, it opened during one of the most crowded theatre seasons in recent memory, among adaptations of popular I.P. ("Back to the Future," "The Notebook"), jukebox musicals ("Hell's Kitchen"), and splashy revivals ("Cabaret"; "Merrily We Roll Along," a onetime Stephen Sondheim flop turned posthumous Broadway hit). "Lempicka" was one of an increasingly rare species in Times Square—a work conceived entirely from scratch. A propulsive, poppy "bio-musical" in the tradition of "Evita," it chronicled the life story of Tamara de Lempicka, a bisexual Art Deco painter who was famous in her heyday, in nineteen-twenties Paris, but who subsequently fell into obscurity. That it got to Broadway at all was due in significant part to the reputation of its director, the forty-three-year-old Tony winner Rachel Chavkin, who with two previous musicals—"Natasha, Pierre & the Great Comet of 1812" and "Hadestown"—had established a track record of turning offbeat projects into hits on the Broadway stage.

Chavkin is by her own description a "devourer of outside information," including feedback about her work. In the weeks before a show's première, she invites friends and former collaborators to see it and asks them to text her "one good thing and one bad thing." She told me, "I am trying to always be listening to where my own taste comes into contact with the room's taste. An audience is so good at teaching you, What's this moment *about*?"

The night of "Lempicka" 's "final dress"—the first performance before an audience—Chavkin was standing near the stage door of the Longacre Theatre,

PHOTOGRAPH BY PARI DUKOVIC

wearing an oversized patchwork coat. She has a decidedly Gen X sense of personal style (baggy flannel shirts, combat boots, chunky black glasses) and most days pulls her long brown hair into a girlish style: pigtail buns, Heidi braids. She is rarely without a giant backpack full of scripts, reference books, a battered Nalgene bottle, Tupperware tubs of leftovers, and an iPad featuring a sticker that reads "You Are on Native Land." In conversation, her favorite words include "fuck" and "yummy," an adjective she uses to describe a particularly satisfying idea or dramatic moment.

"Lempicka" was about to begin a month of previews, when the show would be open to the general public but not yet officially "locked" for reviewers. Chavkin said that this is "when the real work begins," as the clock starts ticking down to opening night. She is not someone who gets easily stressed. At a recent checkup, the doctor told her that she had the blood pressure of a twelve-year-old. Her husband, Jake Heinrichs, a theatrical-lighting supervisor, said that, even during intensive work periods, "Rachel always falls asleep in five minutes." But she'd experienced a moment of anxiety after the first full run-through, two nights before. "I came home and was, like, 'It's a mess, it's a mess!'" she said. Heinrichs had handed her a beer and told her, reassuringly, "Remember, it's *just a play*."

Outside the theatre, an old colleague of Chavkin's, a costume designer who goes by Machine Dazzle, approached, wearing a rainbow-colored sweater.

"Machine!" Chavkin called out. Chavkin's professional roots are in the weirder reaches of the downtown theatre scene. She and Dazzle had worked together years before, on a five-hour theatre piece written by and starring the avant-garde performance artist Taylor Mac.

"You have to send me one bad thing and one good thing," Chavkin said.

"I'll send you two good things and two bad things!" Dazzle said.

Chavkin glanced across the street at the marquee of the Walter Kerr Theatre. For the past five years, the Kerr has been home to "Hadestown," Chavkin's biggest commercial success. The show, a retelling of the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice written by the singer-songwriter Anaïs Mitchell, often plays to sold-out Broadway audiences, and has spawned both a West End production and an ongoing U.S. tour. "Lempicka"'s publicists had orchestrated a publicity stunt for later in the week to capitalize on her shows' proximity: in front of the two theatres, the city would hold a ceremony to temporarily rechristen the street Chavkin Way.

"Hadestown" arrived on Broadway shortly after a run in London, where, as Chavkin put it, "the show really became itself." "Lempicka" had a more halting trajectory. In 2017, Chavkin had planned to stage a revival of a different bio-musical about an artist, the Sondheim classic "Sunday in the Park with George," about the Pointillist painter Georges Seurat, at the Williamstown Theatre Festival. But then she found out that another version, starring Jake Gyllenhaal, was on its way to Broadway. Years before, she'd met Gould and Kreitzer when they were developing "Lempicka" at the Yale Repertory Theatre. Now she called them and proposed taking it to Williamstown. "I was, like, 'Hi, remember me?'" she said. The Williamstown production, in 2018, got a warm review in the *Times* from Ben Brantley, who called Chavkin a "miracle worker," and the producers scheduled a pre-Broadway run in California. Then the plan was disrupted by the pandemic. When "Lempicka" finally made it to the La Jolla Playhouse, in 2022, reviews were mixed. A critic at the *Times* of San Diego wrote that "the show could use more revising, condensing—and heart." The version coming to Broadway—with a generous $19.2 million capitalization—would be shorter, with retooled choreography and a brand-new set.

Chavkin is unshy about asking what she calls "earthquake questions" about a project, even late in the development process. She often notes that a theatre director's capacity for problem-solving rests in part on a simple equation: "Time equals the number of choices you get to make." If there's time left, then one can still change one's mind, rethink, correct course. She told me, "It's not magic how something looks onstage. Someone—a lot of people, actually—made a fuckin' series of choices, that were based on a million bad choices that then got slightly better."

Before becoming a Broadway director, Chavkin had what she describes as "zero relationship to Broadway." She grew up in Silver Spring, Maryland, as the only child of two prominent civil-rights lawyers. The culture in the household was intense, intellectual, and obsessed with social justice. "When I was very, very young, I was taught that Ronald Reagan was stealing food from poor children," Chavkin told me. Her parents waged long legal battles over children's welfare and health-care access and instilled in Chavkin the value of professional grit. (Her mother, Sara Rosenbaum, recalls advising her daughter, "If you can't do the fight anymore, you shouldn't be in it. It should never feel old or dispassionate.") They also gave Chavkin an early introduction to sophisticated art. She recalled one performance of Bertolt Brecht's "Threepenny Opera" at the National Theatre: the ballad singer "came out and was *showering* spit all over the audience. I can remember being just magnetized—the wet and the chaos and the organicness."

For six summers, beginning in middle school, Chavkin attended Stagedoor Manor, a sleepaway theatre camp in the Catskills, whose notable alumni include Lea Michele, Beanie Feldstein, and Ben Platt. ("I still have mixed feelings about it, because it cost so much money and was such a status game," Chavkin told me, of the camp. "It is also probably the reason I do what I do today.") But she was more of a brooding stoner than a show-tunes-obsessed theatre kid, and she was wary of art that she perceived as inauthentic. After high school, she enrolled at the Playwrights Horizons Theatre School, an interdisciplinary wing of N.Y.U.'s Tisch School of the Arts. Her favorite class there was an ungraded seminar called Creating Original Work, taught by the modern dancer and choreographer Marleen Pennison, which had only one assignment: to be "interesting alone onstage for ten minutes." Chavkin became so addicted to the challenge that she took the course three semesters in a row, crafting "hilariously ambitious" pieces such as a character study inspired by a line from the Great Depression tome "Let Us Now Praise Famous Men." Her idols were experimental theatre companies like the Wooster Group; she considered most Broadway "cheesy." She told me, "I didn't want to think about plays that had already been written. I wanted to think about *big ideas*."

Playwrights Horizons emphasized

"Everything is farm-to-fief-to-lord-to-duchy-to-table."

• •

the collaborative aspects of theatre-making. After college, while Chavkin was in graduate school for directing, at Columbia, she and five friends from N.Y.U. co-founded a theatre company, the TEAM, with a staunchly anti-hierarchical, consensus-driven process, such that no work could be credited to a single author. Her friend and fellow Playwrights alumnus Jay Sterkel recalled that from early on Chavkin "saw herself as the manager of the people, the keeper of the story. She specifically wanted to occupy that role." He added, "This group began to coalesce that was like the Rachel Chavkin Players." But Chavkin took issue with this characterization, which has been a lasting source of tension within the company, she said. She always considered herself an equal in the creative process, she told me, even if, as a director, she was perceived as having a certain "positional power." (Perhaps tellingly, the name the TEAM—the Theatre of the Emerging American Moment—was both a nod to the group's collective mind-set and a reference to a college nickname for Chavkin, who liked to wear an old T-shirt from a family fun run that read "Team Chavkin.") The TEAM's pieces featured a gleeful cascade of pop-culture references, historical research, and heady tangents about political and social issues: reality TV, teen pregnancy. In 2005, the group brought two shows to the Edinburgh Fringe Festival and won an award for up-and-coming companies; they earned the same prize again in 2006 and 2008. The British stage director John Tiffany recalled, "It was so different to any other theatre that I saw coming out of New York. It felt almost more connected to indie filmmaking."

Chavkin also began collaborating with artists outside the TEAM, including Dave Malloy, the writer and composer of "Natasha, Pierre & the Great Comet of 1812." That musical, based on an excerpt of "War and Peace," was an immersive "electropop opera" about a naïve socialite (Natasha) and a lonely intellectual (Pierre, originally played by Malloy) in nineteenth-century Moscow on the eve of a looming astronomical event. For the show's first staging, at the nonprofit theatre Ars Nova, in 2012, Chavkin and her creative team transformed the tiny venue into a Russian night club, with the walls swathed in red velvet and audience members seated at café tables; as the story unfolded, the performers whirled through the crowd delivering bottles of vodka and plates of pierogi. "Comet" became a cult phenomenon and attracted a group of ambitious producers. In 2013, to scale up the production without losing its communal atmosphere, they paid to put up a giant tent to house two runs in vacant Manhattan lots. When "Comet" finally reached Broadway, in 2016, Chavkin and her team retained an unusual degree of rowdy interactivity, in part by seating more than a hundred audience members on the stage.

The director Brian Kulick, one of Chavkin's mentors at Columbia, told me that there are "forest directors and tree directors"—big-picture people and detail people—and that when he first met Chavkin she was "the best tree director I had ever met. So detailed, so specific, so alive." She tends to create her most showstopping moments through what she calls "simple gestures." At the end of "Comet," a forlorn Pierre (originally played on Broadway by Josh Groban) takes a slow walk on a winter's night, singing in a single beam of light. But soon the ensemble members, who have scattered throughout the theatre in the dark, begin a chorale underneath his words, and Pierre looks heavenward as a huge, Sputnik-inspired chandelier—the titular great comet—starts to glow, brighter and brighter, until the entire theatre is illuminated. Every member of both the cast and the audience gazes up, too, creating a startling sense of communion between performer and viewer. The director Lear deBessonet told me, "When I go to see one of Rachel's pieces, I know that I'm going to feel electricity in my body, during these moments of liftoff." Charles Isherwood, in the *Times*, called "Comet" "the most innovative and the best new musical to open on Broadway since 'Hamilton,'" and added, with a "heresy alert," that of the two he preferred "Comet." The show earned twelve Tony nominations, the most for any production that season, including one for Best Direction. Chavkin said, "We felt like these kids storming the castle."

For better or worse, the Broadway musical is a genre that favors legibility. Both "Comet" and "Hadestown" feature opening numbers that introduce the cast of characters one by one. ("Gonna have to study up a little bit if you want to keep with the plot," the "Comet" ensemble sings.) During the first week of "Lempicka" previews, Chavkin told me, of its opening scene, "We've heard from people who are kind of confused." Tamara de Lempicka's life spanned nearly the entire twentieth century. A half-Jewish upper-class Polish woman, she married into a wealthy Christian family, survived the Bolshevik Revolution, went on to make her name in Paris, painting sen-

sual but hard-edged nudes of women, and then fled the Nazi occupation for Los Angeles, where she lived well into old age. The heart of "Lempicka" was a bisexual love triangle between Tamara; her husband, Tadeusz; and a fictionalized prostitute named Rafaela, based on one of Lempicka's regular portrait subjects. The opening number churned through years of backstory in less than ten minutes: Tamara marries Tadeusz and has a baby in tsarist Russia, and Tadeusz is arrested during the 1917 Revolution. After Tamara barters her jewels (and, eventually, her body) for Tadeusz's freedom, the pair decide to flee together to France. To aid the audience on this hectic sprint through history, the show relied on explanatory text projections: "Russia, 1916"; "Night train to Paris."

There'd been a back-and-forth about whether to slow down the action by including a prologue in which Tamara sits on a park bench in old age and outlines her past. Chavkin had cut the scene in rehearsals, preferring to toss audiences directly into the maelstrom. Now, at the request of Kreitzer, the playwright, a soft-spoken woman with purple hair, Chavkin was considering putting the scene back in, but with a new song—actually an old one, from the La Jolla production. A few days into previews, she texted me, "Girl, we're totally gonna put back in the old lady top of the show."

The next Monday, with three weeks to go before the première, Chavkin was at the theatre for a "massive day" of implementing the changes. The auditorium, full of tech equipment, had the look of a NASA control room; by night, it would be cleared out to accommodate audiences. Chavkin was calmly sitting in the center of it all on a "butt board," a long cushion that lies on top of the theatre seats ("the *only* way to get through tech," she said), but she's an energetic physical presence on set, regularly leaping up to demonstrate her staging ideas. Another day, I saw her take a running jump onto a wooden platform to act out a transition she had in mind, only to trip and fall. Without missing a beat, she laughed and told the performers, "Don't do that."

Among Chavkin's challenges with the opening was a matter of audience allegiances: Tamara's story invited the audience to root for the aristocrats over the revolutionaries. "Some friends said they weren't quite sure whose perspective we're watching," Chavkin told me. "Obviously, I, for one, really feel for the Bolsheviks, but it's not their story, and if you don't know firmly whose story to be oriented toward then the opening is not doing its job." The prologue wouldn't exactly resolve the awkward class politics, and it had a whiff of the overfamiliar (the old lady from "Titanic," the bench scene from "Forrest Gump"), but it would at least help center Tamara in the tale.

Onstage, Eden Espinosa, the forty-six-year-old actor playing Tamara, was sitting on the hotly debated park bench, clutching a cane and wearing a wide-brimmed hat. On a scrim behind her were hazy palm trees and the words "Los Angeles, 1975." The costume designer, Paloma Young, and two associates fiddled with Espinosa's satin swing coat. To finesse the transition from the new first scene to the old first scene, Chavkin wanted to execute a dramatic onstage costume change that involved stripping off Tamara's old-lady outfit onstage to reveal a wedding gown beneath. Chavkin asked, via the "God mike"—a handheld microphone used to communicate with the stage—if they were ready to carry out the quick transformation. "Oh, yeah!" Young said, flashing a thumbs-up.

The new-old number was a wistful song, laced with bitterness. Tamara may look like an "old, eccentric bat," but she was once an art-world star who "painted what a woman could be." Chavkin grinned when Espinosa got to the lyric

"History's a bitch, but so am I!" She told me, "I'm so glad we got it back in, because I want it to be on all the merch. Can't you just see it on a mug?" The existing merchandise featured a minimalist outline of Lempicka's face. "It is so *conservative!*" Chavkin said. "They should be selling fucking garter belts that say 'Lempicka' on them." A tagline that the marketing team was using to promote the show was so broad as to be opaque: "All she ever wanted was everything."

Owing to union rules, rehearsal had to wrap at four-thirty. Chavkin sang a little ditty to herself: "There's never enough *tiiime*." Espinosa looked weary. "Lempicka," which she'd joined early in its development, was her first Broadway role in more than a decade and was, as Chavkin put it, "fucking unforgiving." Espinosa had to sing big and belty in nearly every scene. Now, after rehearsing some new choreography with the whole cast, she walked to the front of the stage shaking her head. "I'm sorry," she said, softly. "But this is a *lot*, because everyone's on different beats, and on different words."

Chavkin nodded warmly, taking this in. "Ensemble, how are you feeling?" she asked over the mike. One chorus member suggested that just the dancers do the new steps for the next performance, and Chavkin seemed pleased by the temporary solution.

With five minutes left, the stage manager asked if she wanted to run the number one more time. "Yeah, baby!" Chavkin said, triumphantly kicking out one leg. As others were flagging, she seemed to be gaining steam. A few days later, she texted me that they were pulling the opening scene apart all over again.

When I first met Chavkin, in 2019, "Hadestown" had just won eight Tonys, including Best Direction of a Musical, and Chavkin had become something of a theatre-world cause célèbre after using her acceptance speech to point out that no other Broadway musical that season had been directed by a woman. ("This is not a pipeline issue," she said. "It is a failure of imagination.") Like "Comet," "Hadestown" managed to maintain the scrappy feel of downtown theatre in an uptown space. Anaïs Mitchell's poetic score, which was previously released as a folk concept album, is far earthier than standard Broadway fare; the boisterous band plays directly onstage. The show opens with the narrator, the messenger god Hermes, initiating a call-and-response with the audience to invoke a myth-making space: "All right?" "All right!" (Chavkin said, "I generally don't believe in the fourth wall.") The playwright Bess Wohl, one of Chavkin's regular collaborators, told me, "I so often see women directors'

work being compared to the theatrical equivalent of needlepoint—small and delicate." Chavkin, she went on, favors the "brash and huge and messy."

In one conversation, Chavkin mentioned that Guggenheim fellowships are not awarded to theatre directors, on the ground that their work is to interpret, not generate. "Interpretive art *is* generative," she said, adding, "You change the meaning of something depending on how you deliver it." Still, directors, like editors of written stories, must work with the raw material they're given, and the raw material of "Lempicka" was in some ways an unnatural match for Chavkin. Structurally and sonically, the musical hewed to Broadway convention. Gould, the composer, told me that he wrote the score in the spirit of sprawling eighties blockbuster musicals. "I've been calling this show '*Lez* Miz,'" he joked. The set, designed by Riccardo Hernández, was sleek and mechanical, with what Chavkin calls "whizbangs," including fly-in triangular screens and an Eiffel Toweresque jungle gym of light-up staircases. Chavkin, however, told me that she saw the production's traditional elements as "drag," under cover of which to "smuggle a nuanced, queer narrative onto Broadway."

"Lempicka" places itself in dialogue with "Sunday in the Park with George"—"Woman is plane, color, light," Tamara sings, echoing Sondheim's famous song "Color and Light." But the two musicals take very different approaches to the art at their center. "Sunday," cerebral and meticulous, makes a case for Seurat's rigorous and somewhat chilly compositions; the subject and the form of the show align, bringing, as Sondheim puts it in George's first song, "order to the whole." In "Lempicka," the art and the animating ideas are at odds. The women in Tamara's portraits look inscrutable and machinelike, as if they've been slicked over by a Zamboni. Her mantra in the show is "Never let them see your brushstrokes," a principle that she applies both to her paintings and to her personal life. But the story's goal is to expose a crosshatching of experiences beneath the varnish—aging, trauma, persecution, dislocation. Living honestly, the musical ultimately argues, means letting one's brushstrokes show. Chavkin told me, "Mess is queerness. Mess is anti-establishment. Mess is truth."

Perhaps accordingly, the musical favored a clash of visual styles that sometimes left the production feeling disjointed and overstuffed. The choreography, by Raja Feather Kelly, leaned on references to Madonna, who is a collector of Lempicka's art and projects her paintings during arena concerts. Ensemble members in cone bustiers vogued across the stage. A synth-heavy number about futurism was wildly entertaining but felt ported in from a Depeche Mode music video. My favorite parts of the production traded such winking anachronisms for louche prewar glamour. In one stand-out scene, Tamara and Rafaela visit a clandestine lesbian bar and lounge among tuxedoed women. A pink velvet banquette emerges out of a clamshell-shaped trapdoor that Chavkin described as a "vagina in the floor." As "Comet" had done with a sliver of "War and Peace," the scene made its esoteric particulars feel wholly enveloping.

Chavkin is not usually inclined toward sentimental story lines. "Unsentimentality is the real beauty," she told me. But "Lempicka" promised to be, among everything else, a big, tragic romance. Throughout the development process, Chavkin and her team struggled to build an emotional armature that could support Tamara's two competing love stories. A triangle needs three strong sides, and it was hard to believe that Tadeusz, who is jobless and adrift in Paris, could hold Tamara's affection as powerfully as the charismatic Rafaela, played by the scene-stealing alto Amber Iman. They'd tried to make Tadeusz more appealing, removing a scene of him striking Tamara and adding dialogue in which he admits he's been "a bit of a shit" about her painting career. One day, during rehearsals, Andrew Samonsky, the actor playing Tadeusz, told Chavkin, "I'm feeling a bit lost, just because of all the versions. I'm trying to calibrate who he is." Chavkin came up with the idea of having Tadeusz don a three-piece suit as he sang his solo number—"putting on armor," she called it.

A few days before the première, Chavkin and I spoke by phone. She seemed to be anticipating, perhaps a bit defensively, all the reasons that critics might dismiss "Lempicka" out of hand—" 'Too big.' 'Another bio-pic.' 'Too queer.' " She added, "I think the show is quite profound, and there's the terror of, Will that be seen? Will it be seen for the wonder that I think it is?"

Chavkin and Heinrichs bought a two-bedroom apartment in Crown Heights, Brooklyn, seventeen years ago, when they earned less than sixty thousand dollars a year combined. They still live there today, although the commute to Times Square is long, and as a Broadway director she is now well compensated. (For the sake of pay transparency, she told me that the year "Hadestown" opened and became a hit she made more than eight hundred thousand dollars. "I want this to be very much on the record," she told me, "because no one talks enough about money.") When I went over to her apartment for dinner one night in February, she pulled a tub of soup out of the fridge and asked me to sniff it to make sure it "hadn't gone funky," then tasked me with heating it up in the microwave. In the dining room, Chavkin's Tony Award for "Hadestown" was wedged on the cluttered top of a tall wooden cabinet. A spindly chandelier—one of a number of smaller lights used on the set of "Comet"—hovered elegantly, but the table beneath was nearly invisible under a sea of papers and books. Rather than try to make space, Chavkin asked if I would mind sitting on the living-room floor.

Chavkin conducts her personal life with the same collaborative ethos that she brings to the theatre. In 2019, she agreed to serve as a surrogate for her best friends, a gay artist couple who live in Texas. At the time, she and Heinrichs were leaning toward not having children, in part because Heinrichs's father died of hereditary Alzheimer's. In an essay for *Vogue*, she recalled that getting pregnant involved some "ferrying of sperm-filled syringes around my flat" during the London run of "Hadestown." When the baby was born—also on Chavkin's floor—the daddies, as she calls them, temporarily relocated to an apartment upstairs that Chavkin rents. They moved back to Texas a year later, and Chavkin realized that she wanted a child of her

own. She and Heinrichs had a son, Sam, in 2021, and she considers the children long-distance family. Heinrichs's sister, Liz, now lives in the upstairs apartment and helps to care for Sam, an arrangement that allows Chavkin to work marathon rehearsal days and late nights at the theatre. "It all sounds complicated, but it really isn't," Chavkin told me. "Or maybe it is just the kind of complicated that I like."

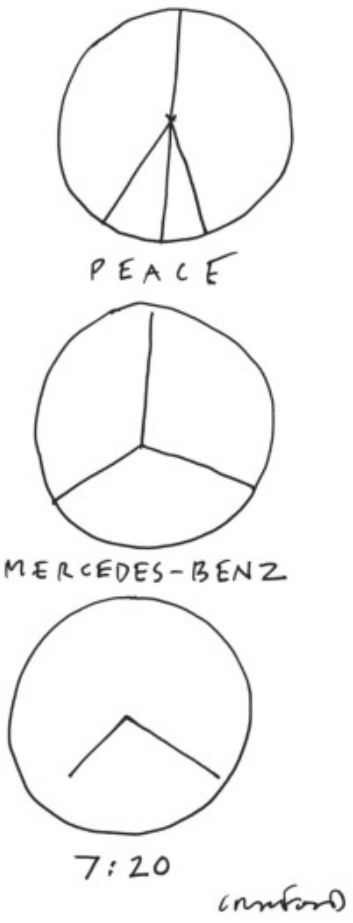
"Lempicka" is not Chavkin's first Broadway production to meet a difficult end. "Comet" struggled to sustain itself commercially despite its critical acclaim. The cast was among the largest on Broadway at the time, and the show was expensive to maintain. After the better part of a year, Josh Groban left the cast and sales plummeted. In July of 2017, the "Hamilton" alum Okieriete Onaodowan assumed the role of Pierre, but the producers cut his run short to allow the veteran theatre actor Mandy Patinkin to do a special engagement, hoping that his star power would revive sales. Instead, the change caused a scandal when an organization called Broadway Black criticized the decision, prompting a wave of social-media outrage, and Patinkin promptly backed out. Weathering what Chavkin called a "shitstorm" of bad publicity, "Comet" abruptly announced a closing date.

Chavkin has learned, in other public ways, that the hazards of working in the commercial theatre are political as well as artistic. She is known for casting diversely and for recruiting new talent, but she has also faced complaints about workplace equity. During the reckonings of summer, 2020, a Black costume designer who'd worked on "Lempicka" in Williamstown but wasn't kept on posted an Instagram video (later deleted) alleging unfair treatment. Chavkin publicly apologized, and afterward hired an "anti-oppressionist" leadership coach with whom she continues to work. (Last year, a performer from "Hadestown" sued the production for racial discrimination and retaliation. The racial-discrimination claims were dismissed on First Amendment grounds, but the retaliation claims are still pending.) Amber Gray, a mixed-race actress and TEAM member who played the original Persephone in Chavkin's "Hadestown," told me that her relationship with Chavkin has grown strained over time owing to issues of compensation. As the director, Chavkin receives royalties; as an actor, Gray does not. Chavkin told me that she plans to share her royalties with the show's original Broadway leads, but that she has faced bureaucratic hurdles in doing so. Gray said, "I think some of her morals and ethics—there's not space for them in those commercial machines." Still, she gave Chavkin credit for trying to put her ideals into practice in a "yucky, antiquated" system. "Commercial theatre is not about camaraderie. It's not about the art. It is about making money," Gray said, adding, "That eats people alive."

There are feast and famine years on Broadway. The glut of new productions this season—thirty-nine, including twenty-one musicals—belies the fact that audiences' appetite for the theatre has yet to recover from the pandemic; as of March, Broadway attendance is down seventeen per cent from pre-COVID levels. According to *Forbes*, only about a quarter of Broadway shows become commercial hits even in a good year. Jack Viertel, a theatre producer and the author of "The Secret Life of the American Musical," told me that, given the competitive current conditions, "Lempicka," lacking instant name recognition or celebrity stunt casting, "couldn't have opened at a worse time." From the first week of previews, its financial outlook was dire. Tickets were priced modestly, and, though the theatre was mostly full each night, it was bringing in only in the ballpark of four hundred thousand dollars a week, nowhere near what it needed to recoup its costs. The show badly needed the buy-in of critics, or a sudden surge in word-of-mouth fandom.

On opening night, April 14th, Chavkin walked the red carpet wearing silk Rachel Comey pants in the same shade of emerald as Lempicka used in her self-portrait "Tamara in the Green Bugatti." There was an after-party at the ritzy Metropolitan Club, which was "fun, until it was less fun," Chavkin told me. Reviews had started to appear shortly after curtain call. Jesse Green, of the *Times*, praised Espinosa and Iman's vocal acrobatics but likened the Bolsheviks scene to "an anemic 'Les Miz'" and wrote that the show lacked "subtlety, complexity and historical precision." (The review's headline twisted the knife: "IT'S NO SUNDAY IN THE PARK WITH 'LEMPICKA.'") Sara Holdren, of *New York*, a former theatre director herself, wrote, "The show pushes and poses—it doesn't let us in." Chavkin said that she spent the end of the after-party sitting with Gould, going "down the spiral." Dave Malloy and Anaïs Mitchell were there, and they attempted to cheer Chavkin up by belting "Thunder Road" with her on the building's marble steps. By the next week, the fate of "Lempicka" was uncertain. Chavkin told me, "Now I just live with a low-level sense of doom." She was quick to note that, if "Lempicka" closed, the worst effects would be felt among the cast and crew, who would suddenly be out of a job. Her next directing project, a musical adaptation of "The Great Gatsby," with a score co-written by the British rock star Florence Welch, had already started rehearsals for an out-of-town première in Boston.

One night in late April, I went with Chavkin to see "The Outsiders," a new Broadway musical based on S. E. Hinton's young-adult novel, which Francis Ford Coppola adapted into a film in 1983. The show had opened three days before "Lempicka," also to mixed reviews, but was



faring well in ticket sales. Its thirty-five-year-old director, Chavkin's friend Danya Taymor—the niece of Julie Taymor, the director of "The Lion King" and one of Chavkin's early heroes—was making her Broadway-musical directorial début.

"The Outsiders," about warring gangs of teen-age boys in Tulsa, Oklahoma, is a crowd-pleaser, with a breezy, if forgettable, score and a cast full of peppy (and in one case shirtless) youths. But its stagecraft is inventive and mature. During intermission, Chavkin noted that one climactic maneuver, featuring two boys leaping onto a moving train with swinging flashlights lighting their way, had echoes of a stunning moment in "Hadestown" when Orpheus travels to the underworld and five large, low-hanging lamps sway out over the audience in perfect unison. "Not in a derivative way," she hastened to add. "They are talking to each other." She walked over to Taymor, who was standing near the front of the stage. "It's *so* fucking good," Chavkin said, squeezing Taymor on the shoulder.

Afterward, on a car ride back to Brooklyn, Chavkin stared out the window. "I often felt, with the TEAM, that we were too warm or emotional or whatnot for downtown," she said. "And then, uptown, I feel very welcomed, but also often have felt like my taste doesn't align with a lot of what gets celebrated or sustained." She went on, "I won't speak to this season at all, for a number of reasons, but in previous seasons I will see stuff and I will just be, like, I don't understand. I am genuinely confused by what 'good' is. It's something about the comfort of the familiar, when what I've always been most exhilarated by is, *I've never seen that before*."

All the great Broadway directors swing and miss. Julie Taymor's "Spider-Man" musical was a notorious disaster. Hal Prince had seven flops in a row, beginning with "Merrily We Roll Along," then made "The Phantom of the Opera." "Gatsby" is expected to eventually transfer to Broadway, but Chavkin said that she's eager to get back to making "weird shit" downtown, and that her financial security from "Hadestown" has given her the privilege of being choosy. She continues to consider the TEAM a "spiritual home base." A project the ensemble has been working on for many years, about the interpersonal legacy of slavery, co-directed by Chavkin and Zhailon Levingston, is scheduled to finish workshopping at BAM in the fall. At the same time, Chavkin is developing her first Hollywood project—a period film about a punk band—with the encouragement of Steven Spielberg, who, after seeing "Hadestown," told her that she thinks like a filmmaker.

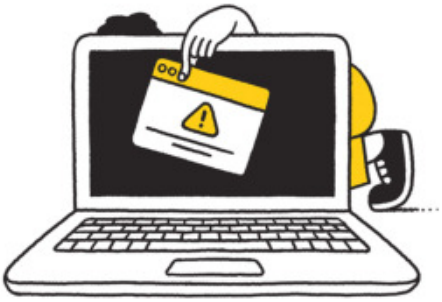
The "Gatsby" closing number features the character of Nick Carraway singing Fitzgerald's famous final line: "So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past." Like "Gatsby," all three of Chavkin's Broadway musicals end tragically, but with a sense that something vital has been gleaned from the heartache. In "Hadestown," after Orpheus fails to rescue Eurydice from Hades—and she falls back into the underworld, via a mechanism that descends beneath the stage—Hermes starts the story over from the top, saying that they will "sing it again." The cast then performs an epilogue, downstage and without microphones, after they've taken their bows. In a book about the making of the show, Anaïs Mitchell writes that Chavkin "felt that the audience *needed* a final moment together, with the Company, to fully process." In "Lempicka," Tamara's art is rediscovered late in her life, but she is still haunted by her personal losses. For most of the musical, Lempicka's paintings are depicted only as digital projections or as empty frames onstage. But, in the final minutes, huge reproductions lower from the ceiling and fill the stage with their jewel tones. "We do not control the world. We control one flat rectangle of canvas at a time," Tamara sings, and—in a lovely "simple gesture"—a "blue-out" of milky sapphire light swallows the stage.

The day after we saw "The Outsiders," the Boston run of "Gatsby" was extended owing to advance demand. The following week, the Tony nominations were announced. "Lempicka" got three nods, including one for Espinosa as Best Actress, but it didn't get Best Musical, and Chavkin was passed over for Best Direction. On May 2nd, Chavkin texted me, "We're about to post a closing notice."

The surge of attention that "Lempicka" needed did arrive, too late. In its last weeks, Lin-Manuel Miranda and Rosie O'Donnell went to see it and posted praise on social media. Madonna slipped into the penultimate performance, wearing huge black sunglasses. A crowd of mostly young and queer fans—Lempeople, they'd taken to calling themselves—camped out in long lines for rush tickets. On closing day, outside the Longacre, a Lemperson named Lauren Cagnetta was dressed in a pink T-shirt emblazoned with Espinosa's face. Cagnetta was seeing the show for the thirty-third time. A twentysomething named Sam Bash sported a fanny pack covered in homemade "Lempicka" buttons. "Shows are short," Bash said, tearily. "But art is long."

Inside the theatre, the mood was raucous. When Espinosa took her place on the bench, the audience erupted. Several numbers got a standing ovation, causing the show to run overtime. The cast, feeding off the energy in the room, seemed newly confident, their performances rawer and more lived in. At intermission, a man sitting behind me, who identified himself as a stage director, described "Lempicka" as the "tragedy of this Broadway season." He went on, "If you don't have original shows, you can't have revivals in twenty years. *Nobody* revives jukebox musicals." After the final bows, the cast and the core creative team lingered onstage to deliver speeches. Their tone was defiant, their narrative neat: the show had simply been misunderstood. Kreitzer, noting that a cast album would be out shortly, quoted Tennessee Williams from "Orpheus Descending": "Wild things leave skins behind them."

Once the audience had shuffled out of the theatre, the crew strung caution tape across the stage. The next day, demolition of the set would begin. Chavkin sat alone in the orchestra section until the house went dark and only a single ghost light illuminated the stage. "It was *different* tonight," she said. In its final moments, "Lempicka" had acquired the kind of abandon that Chavkin's best work is known for. "The cast found more space. It got more complicated, and craggy. You know, when you're first making the machine of a show, it can feel very polished. But my favorite part has always been the cracks." ♦



NOTICE OF SECURITY INCIDENT

BY JAY KATSIR

Dear Data-Breach Victim:

By now you are aware that you are the victim of a data breach. You assumed as much, because the only mail you receive amounts to notices of data breaches, medical bills, and solicitations to donate to a good cause (maybe with a little graphic of a snowflake or a hopeful puppy or a gallbladder around the address window), whose senders will eventually contact you about a data breach. Your mail also sometimes contains postcards from your mother, who is certainly the victim of a data breach. She probably just gave her data away after clicking on a sponsored Google result that said "Real Rapid Passport Renewal Easy Online."

Please know that we take your privacy very seriously. In fact, that seriousness is why you have no idea who we are or why we have your data. But rest assured: when we purchased your data, we placed it under maximum encryption, separating your home address from MRI images of your most vulnerable bones. Regrettably, an incident occurred involving the part of our network that stores digital replicas of your nude abdomen after you've eaten beef pad Thai.

This notice describes the data-breach incident, the steps we have taken in response, and what you can do next.

What Happened?

In or around November or February, 2018/24, we detected suspicious activity within our system. It was not like in the movies, where a big red "ALERT" message flashes onscreen, but there was a honking Klaxon alarm, and someone with a V.R. headset whispered, "This wasn't in the [expletive] training manual." We are working with a cybersecurity firm to identify the missing expletive.

What Information Was Involved?

Your name, SSN, TIN (if that's different, still unclear), credit score, most embarrassing bowling score, and favorite fruit, plus the wildest place you've ever "done it," the name of the street where you grew up, and all of the above for everyone who has ever "done it" in a wild place on the street where you grew up (behind a mailbox!).

Was This Identity Theft?

You seem to be asking a lot of questions. Who are you, anyway? One of the identity thieves?

Circle: Y/N.

What Constitutes Your "Identity"?

You're pretty far into life and you still don't know. Most days, you're not much more than the sum of your insecurities. If left alone for more than a few minutes without the structure of routine, you begin to cry. You can't identify what it means to be yourself, let alone a human being. In the end, did you choose your career simply to better understand your parents? How is it that, when they were your age, they moved so naturally through the adult world? And have you seen this thing about "plastistone" rocks? It's a new form of sedimentary geology; stones fused with plastic garbage have been found on multiple continents, the same plastics that lurk inside your cells, and within your kids, progress and negligence intertwined on the downslope of history.

All of your defining uncertainty was stolen and is being used by criminals to buy ruffle-hem Capris on strawberryfashion.com.

What Are We Doing?

In addition to sending this notice—which wasn't that hard, but wasn't, like, no work—we are offering you eighteen months of free identity monitoring from SecurIDeadbolt, the only A.I.-powered fraud-detection app endorsed by John Cena or a convincing likeness of John Cena. In addition, we are investigating whether we can train a dog to sniff out malware. His name is Rusty; please send us five dollars in the enclosed envelope to sponsor his work.

What Can You Do?

We recommend the following steps to protect your information:

- Remain vigilant. While one eye reads this sentence, the other should scan the room for fraudsters and mountebanks. There! By the bookshelf! (Hm, no. That's just your beloved parakeet, Bernie.)
- Set up fraud alerts by contacting one of the three major credit bureaus (Experiman, Snarlax, TransDunkin). Anyone who requests your credit report will receive a message that—wait, behind the sofa, is that a masked swindler? Approach with caution; he hasn't seen you yet. There, that's it. And . . . aha! Never mind. Just that clumsy footman, cleaning up a spill. Seems to have dropped his saucer of private data.
- For California residents: Must be nice to live out there in the sun and surf.

Is There More Information You Should Know?

Yes, but we're not just going to put it here where anyone can steal it. See? We're already rebuilding your trust. ♦

LUCI GUTIÉRREZ

PERSONAL HISTORY

MY FATHER'S COURT

The Detroit Pistons became his second family.

BY MOLLY McCLOSKEY

The author (left), with her father, Jack McCloskey, and siblings.

One night, when I was a sophomore in college, my father came to see me play basketball in Philadelphia. It was 1984. I was on the team at St. Joseph's, and he was the general manager of the Detroit Pistons. He and my mother were long divorced, and I saw him only two or three times a year, when he came to town for a Pistons game or to scout a player. I had lost my starting spot at the beginning of the season, and that night I didn't play much or particularly well.

My father waited for me after the game, and as soon as I saw him I burst into tears. I can still see his expression, tender and somehow unsurprised, even though we both knew that my performance was irrelevant. I had landed a full scholarship, but it was clear that I wasn't going to develop into a college player of even minor significance. Something else was at stake, and I think we knew that, too. The game was the language he spoke, and I was losing my fluency.

I grew up the youngest of six, all of us obsessed with basketball. My oldest brother, Mike, was on the freshman team at Duke; my first team was called the California Fancies. I was four, my brother Roman was six, and our basket was an iron pot set on the coffee table in the rec room of our house in Winston-Salem. As "Kip Reynolds" and "Mike Jetson," we routed a series of make-believe opponents. My father was then the head coach at Wake Forest. Every fall, the team came for brunch, and our house would fill with his other family, giants who scooped me up and set me on their shoulders. I was captivated by them, and named my imaginary friend Walker, after the co-captain Dickie Walker.

There was a feeling of fun, of constant tumult, in our house, but my father could be a hard-ass, too. He'd grown up in eastern Pennsylvania—his father and grandfather were coal miners—and in the Second World War he had skippered a landing craft off Okinawa, a vessel that transported troops and tanks between larger ships and the shore. He had no tolerance for the spoiled, the entitled, the soft. His pitiless code of masculinity meant that my brothers got the worst of it; he might call them "Mary Jane" if he thought that they seemed weak or inclined to quit when things got challenging. Above all, he hated attitude. What finally brought him to the pros—in 1972, he got a job coaching the Portland Trail Blazers, and my family moved across the country—was an inability to keep sucking up to high-school recruits. One day, he went to see a star senior in New York. The kid was spinning the ball, acting cocky. "Hey, Coach Jack," he said, "what's Wake Forest gonna do for me?" My father pondered this. "You know what we're gonna do?" he replied. "We're gonna stick that ball right up your ass." Then he walked out.

Things got off to a bad start in Portland. The Blazers had the No. 1 pick in the 1972 draft. My father wanted Bob McAdoo, but the Blazers' owner chose LaRue Martin. McAdoo went on to win Rookie of the Year at Buffalo en route to the Hall of Fame, while Martin is still widely regarded as the worst first pick in N.B.A. history. My father clashed with the star forward Sidney Wicks. Losses piled up. At my new school, boys taunted me: "Your dad sucks!" I never said a word about the teasing at home. I somehow knew that my job was to bear the ridicule on my father's behalf.

After two years with Portland, my father was fired. By 1976, he was floundering, trying to sell time-shares in Hawaiian condos from a rickety desk in our den. And then, that spring, my parents got divorced. My father had fallen in love with someone else. He rented a grim little apartment in a Portland exurb, where my brother Roman and I, still young enough to be living at home, visited him. I remember depressing Friday evenings with takeout burgers, limned, for me, with the frightening realization that the bottom could drop right out of the most

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solid-seeming things. But within months my father was gone from Oregon altogether, having returned to the N.B.A. fold when the Los Angeles Lakers' coach, Jerry West, hired him to be his assistant.

My mother got a part-time job at a weekly newspaper, and we moved to a house in a cheaper part of town. Then we set about what she called "raising each other"—trying to navigate our new reality without the ballast of my father.

His first year in L.A., he got remarried, making a new home with the woman for whom he'd left my mother. Roman and I visited them twice. I don't remember much of those stays, apart from sunshine, palm trees, and Jack Nicholson at courtside. It felt to me as though my father had stolen away to a glamorous new life; to my continuing shame, I told my mother I wanted to live with him, an idea that no one but me found appealing. Indeed, for reasons that were never articulated, my father would not invite me to visit him again for another twenty-five years, by which time we were as good as strangers.

His job in L.A. was short-lived. When West moved to the front office after three seasons, my father was passed over for the head job. He went to un-glam Indiana, to be an assistant with the Pacers, and finally to Detroit, which was then home to the worst team in the league.

I was a sophomore in high school, in 1979, when my father—a "rumpled, graying, mostly unknown . . . old basketball man," as one sports blogger has described him—took the Pistons job. Throughout high school, Roman and I would meet him at his hotel when he was in town for a game against the Blazers, and he would take us to dinner, awkward outings that only underscored our growing estrangement from him. We would go to the game, feeling briefly like V.I.P.s with our complimentary tickets, and then he would be gone again.

One of my father's visits to Portland coincided with a meeting I had during my junior year with my high-school coach and the principal after I had been caught drinking. My mother, weary from parenting two teen-agers alone, insisted that my father go with me. I was nervous. The coach, after reminding me of everything I stood to lose if this sort of behavior continued, benched me for four games. Once we were outside, my father, who'd been serious throughout the meeting, laughed and elbowed me, as though we'd pulled off a caper. I was relieved—no sign of the hard-ass—then disappointed: what became of me seemed of little consequence to him.

By my senior year, my team was heading for the state tournament and I had begun attracting attention from small Division I schools. I sent my father newspaper clippings from our games. I wasn't playing basketball to win his attention; I played because I loved it and I was good, but I wanted him to know that I was good. I don't remember him ever coming to any of my high-school games. (He must've seen me play sometime, because I can still hear him scolding me: "You're yanking the chain." He meant that I was pulling back on the jump-shot follow-through—the extended arm and flexed wrist that are the mark of proper form.) It never occurred to me that he might go out of his way to see me play, or that I might be entitled to ask him to—that I might be entitled to ask him for anything at all. Within the world of sports, he was becoming famous and important. A couple of times a year, he breezed into town. He was more dashing and elusive than the bland, ploddingly present fathers of my friends, but the thrill was fleeting. I made do with a kind of phantom, those moments he manifested on the television or in the excited chatter of boys and men I knew, and it would be years before I admitted to myself just how much I had needed from him, and how little I got.

One night, I played against the daughter of Jimmy Lynam, who had left the head job at St. Joseph's to be an assistant with the Blazers. Jimmy was at the game, and afterward he told the women's coach at St. Joseph's that he ought to have a look at me. The school was nearly three thousand miles away, but my parents were from Pennsylvania, my siblings and I had all been born in Philadelphia, and my father had coached at Penn. Philadelphia basketball felt like family, a return to the unsundered past.

Meanwhile, my father was building his team in Detroit. He made thirty-eight trades in ten years, earning him the nickname Trader Jack. He started with Isiah Thomas, whom he drafted in 1981. Isiah wanted to play in Chicago, his home town. He told my father, "You don't have anybody I can pass to." My father said he'd bench him before he'd trade him, and promised to get him some better teammates. My father had a knack for spotting overlooked talent, and he wanted players as obsessed with winning as he was. The center Bill Laimbeer, whom he plucked from Cleveland, had been drafted a lowly sixty-fifth. According to the coach Chuck Daly, who would soon join the Pistons, Laimbeer couldn't jump over a piece of paper, but my father had seen him battling to the final buzzer in hopeless games, and knew he wanted him. My father drafted the future Hall of Famers Joe Dumars and Dennis Rodman as Detroit's eighteenth and twenty-seventh picks. Even the owners of the Pistons were mystified by Dumars: "Who is *he*?" My father loved him from Day One, inviting him home for Thanksgiving his rookie year. Dumars told me recently that, as the new guy, he'd been holding back on the court. One day, my father said, "You don't have to wait to be great. You're ready. Go ahead and do it." That night, Dumars put in an explosive performance: "He cleared the way for me with that conversation."

Rounding out the front court were the power forwards John Salley and Rick Mahorn. Salley was charismatic and all smiles, while Mahorn was an enforcer, known as McNasty when he'd played for Washington. Vinnie Johnson, dubbed the Microwave because he heated up so fast, was the third guard. When my father traded Adrian Dantley, beloved in Detroit, for Mark Aguirre, who had a reputation for being selfish and spoiled, Pistons fans were angry. But Aguirre blended in beautifully, and all the shuffling finally paid off. In 1989, my father's tenth year with the team, the Pistons swept the Lakers for their first championship. They won the title again the next year in Portland, on a sweet jumper by the Microwave with .7 seconds on the clock. Both championships were won against teams that had let my father go, which must have been particularly gratifying.

By then, the Bad Boys were legendary. The moniker had gained traction after CBS used it during a 1988 halftime feature about the Pistons and it got picked up by the league for its end-of-season video on the team. The players embraced

it. Detroiters loved the Bad Boys with a crazy love, but just about everywhere else they were reviled. I still meet men who, when they learn of my connection, hiss, "I *hated* that team." The Bad Boys were extremely physical—some say dirty, not averse to hard fouls or provoking brawls—and were viewed by many as undeserving upstarts who brought something ugly to the sport. It wasn't just the will to win but the way they won, the emphasis on grind over dazzle. The sportswriter Keith Langlois compared the players to "a bunch of hard hats swinging picks and wielding shovels." My father's truculence and competitiveness clearly set a tone. Years earlier, when Pat Riley accidentally broke the coach Stan Albeck's nose during a casual three-on-three game in L.A., my father had wanted to fight him over it. At sixty-two, my father went one-on-one with Mahorn, to see if Mahorn was ready to come back after an injury. "I was, like, this old motherfucker? I kicked his ass," Mahorn told me recently, laughing. "But he was out there playing hard."

Sports Illustrated ranked the Bad Boys among the most hated N.B.A. teams of all time, describing them in apocalyptic tones: "Between the joy of Magic and the majesty of Michael was the dark and frightening rise of the Bad Boys." The Chicago *Tribune* writer Sam Smith called them "as cunning as Satan." Laimbeer was the most despised Bad Boy of all. Once, at halftime of a playoff game in Atlanta, a fan went on court with a chainsaw and a cardboard replica of Laimbeer's jersey and sawed it to pieces. (Those were the days when you could bring a chainsaw to an N.B.A. game.) Laimbeer welcomed the animosity. They all did, to varying degrees, using it to throw opponents off their game. My father believed that a lot of other G.M.s, not to mention the N.B.A. commissioner David Stern, blamed him for the Pistons' style of play. In an e-mail to me, he wrote, "The commissioner did not like our team for being so rough—I call it competitive so he also did not care for me." Jerry West, with whom he'd coached in L.A., would later observe that my father assembled a team that reflected his character. He meant it as a compliment. "We embodied his damn personality," Mahorn told me. "A bunch of average kinda dudes that just had badass attitudes." Dumars agreed: "We were take-no-prisoners, and that was Jack."

Just how good the team was can get obscured by all the Bad Boys mythology. Isiah was one of the most talented point guards in N.B.A. history, and Michael Jordan would call Dumars the best defender he ever faced. Laimbeer, a star rebounder, was one of the first big men who could consistently hit the three. Rodman had a contained maniacal energy that made him a stunning defender and rebounder. And they were deep—during both championship seasons, no player averaged more than nineteen points per game.

I missed a lot of that era. In 1989, two months before the Pistons' first championship, I moved to Ireland. I was twenty-three. I'd gone for what I thought was a few weeks' visit but had instantly loved it and ended up staying twenty-five years. For a few of those years, I played on a local club team, practicing in cold, rural gyms, the game being the only thread of connection I still felt to my father. He visited me the first summer I was in Ireland, and never again. Five years passed in which I didn't see him at all.

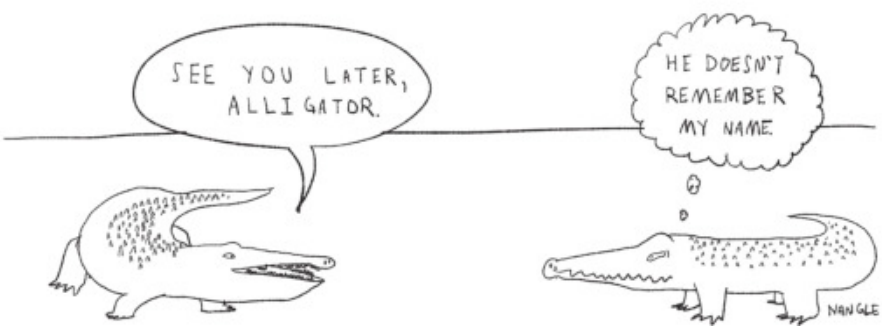
But, in the early two-thousands, he started urging me to visit him. Every other summer, I would go for a few days to Skidaway Island, off the coast of Savannah, where he'd retired with his wife. For the first hour or so, he seemed delighted to see me, but by evening I would feel as though I were underfoot, and that he was waiting to get back to whatever it was I'd interrupted. There were moments of affinity, though. One day, he drove Roman and me around Skidaway in his convertible blasting "Spirit in the Sky," and you never saw three people sing so joyfully about dying.

Not long after I reëntered his life, my father began to drift away again, but in a different manner. In the summer of 2012, I went to Portland for a family wedding that he was also attending. I had just published a book, and, as it happened, would be reading from it at an event the following day. At the reception, my father and I were chatting, and he mentioned that he'd be going to his daughter's reading. He was clearly proud. And then he said, quite sweetly, "Now, who are you?"

One night, soon after I moved back to the U.S., in 2014, I settled in to watch "Bad Boys," a recent installment in ESPN's sports documentary series "30 for 30," which began as a look at the biggest stories from the network's first thirty years on the air. I wasn't prepared for what I saw. While the segment was ostensibly about basketball and winning and being the baddest boys ever, the word "family" came up repeatedly. John Salley said he'd thought it was a crock talking about family in the context of professional sports until he joined the Pistons. "And then I had to readjust myself," he said, "because we were a family." When Rodman wept at the podium after winning Defensive Player of the Year, my father put a hand on his back to steady him. Isiah explained, "That type of family unit that we had was ideal for [Dennis] at a time he really needed it." Dumars remembered, "It was us against the world."

The moment that struck me most was the Hug. It took place in 1991, after the team's loss to the Chicago Bulls in the Conference Finals. Technically, it wasn't *after* the loss, because there were still about eight seconds on the game clock when most of the Pistons walked off the court, right past a stupefied Michael Jordan, their final act as champs a refusal to pass the torch graciously.

As they headed for the tunnel, my father emerged from the opposite direction. He hugged Laimbeer, then Isiah. The camera zoomed in on his face. He



was crying, holding Isiah tight. I've rerun that moment a dozen times. I even found a longer version of it that shows my father pulling away in the direction of the court and Isiah steering him back toward the locker room, talking in his ear, consoling him.

Eventually, I realized why the image hit me so hard. It wasn't just that this was my father at his very best: loyal, vulnerable, utterly invested. It was because it made clear that there were two things I needed to forgive him for: not having been there for me, and having been there for others.

Before my father succumbed fully to dementia, he apologized to me. We were sitting at his breakfast table, and he said quietly and with no preamble, "I'm sorry we weren't closer when you were growing up." I could tell that he had rehearsed this declaration, and I can't say I was unmoved. But he made our estrangement sound like a mutual failing. I was also dismayed by what came next. I had always believed that he kept his distance from me when I was young because going in and out of my life was too painful. But it wasn't that. "I was just so wrapped up in basketball," he said.

I mumbled something about also being sorry—as in, Yeah, it's too bad. Then I took my dishes to the kitchen, leaving him there alone.

As the Alzheimer's progressed, my father began phoning me. His vocabulary was ransacked by dementia, but his utterances rang strangely true.

Once, he said, "It's so cold on this ship."

Another day, he told me, "I'll be leaving the area soon."

He died at ninety-one, on the opening day of the 2017 Finals. Isiah Thomas was providing commentary on NBA TV and paid tribute. "He fought for us in a league and in a time where it was all about the Lakers and the Celtics," he said. "We never would've been the type of team or people that we became had we not met [him] . . . I can sincerely say that we loved Jack McCloskey."

A month later, after the memorial service, I sat in my father's kitchen talking to Isiah. I mentioned the apology. "If you could change one thing," he asked, "what would it be?" I said that I wished my father would have allowed me into his life when I was young. "Everybody would like a do-over," he said softly. Then he added, "How many happy love songs are there?"

I asked if I could call him sometime to talk about my father, and he gave me his number. When we spoke, not long afterward, I mentioned the Hug. "I've had three great hugs in my life—my mom, Jack McCloskey, and my wife," he said. "That's an embrace I'll never forget. We had given all that we could possibly

give. There was nothing more to do with that team than watch it die and be a part of that." I envied the two of them, the bond on display in that moment. But there was also something unexpectedly reassuring about seeing my father in a better light, through someone else's eyes.

I began seeking out other people who had known my father, tracking down Bad Boys, rival coaches, a former *Sports Illustrated* journalist who once interviewed him. I was greedy for details, as though my father were a cold case I might yet crack.

I phoned the ex-Piston William Bedford at the car dealership where he was working. He let out a low whistle when I identified myself, and said, "Oh. My. God," as though I were a long-lost sister. Bedford had been drafted sixth in 1986 by Phoenix; by the time my father traded for him, the following year, he was known to be struggling with a drug problem. He told me my father had gone to twelve-step meetings with him. "It was unbelievable to have a G.M. like that," he said. "Jack was in my corner a hundred per cent."

I was glad to hear that my father had come through for him, but I was also well aware that this was during a period when two of my siblings and I were dealing with alcoholism. It wasn't the first time during my investigations that I'd been conscious of an ignoble impulse: the desire to set someone straight. When people waxed rhapsodic about my father—what a straight-up guy he was, a man you could count on—I would think of the day he walked out on us, the years I wasn't welcome in his home, my mother getting by on her own.

During the height of COVID, I bought myself a blue basketball, and went shooting in the park near my house on a few quiet mornings. I hadn't played in years, but it came back easily. Elbow in. Follow through. *Don't yank the chain.* I didn't learn much from my father about the fundamentals of the game, or about life, really. But he modelled one thing I did have to admire: the art of keeping going.

Last year, I gathered all my father's letters and e-mails to me and read them through. I had begun wondering if there were dimensions to him that my resentment, or the vagaries of memory, had obscured. One note from 2002 came with the clippings I had sent him from my high-school games. "It is not that I don't want them, but you never know how long one is gg to be here, so I felt you would like to have them," he wrote, then added, "You did not get everything." He was referring to the fact that he had held on to a sketch I'd made, as a child, of Charlie Davis, who was my father's star guard at Wake Forest, the first player who really stole his heart.

Finally, I dug out an envelope of photos and letters I had collected the spring after his death. A few of my siblings and I had gone to the house on Skidaway to claim mementos, and the envelope had sat in my closet ever since. I thought I knew what it contained—hadn't I filled it myself?—but there were surprises. A photo of my grandfather, shockingly handsome, before black lung and Camel cigarettes ravaged him. A pocket diary my father kept while on Okinawa after the war: fuel dumps, bomb disposal, the names and Stateside addresses of his men. And a photograph of me. I am four years old, standing in the back yard wearing shorts, no shirt, and a baseball cap and glove. A few years later, I became embarrassed by my tomboyishness and ripped the photo up. But here it was. Scored this way and that, like a cracked mirror. On the back, written in my father's hand: "Molly—she tore this pic, but I saved the pieces & had it restored as well as they could."

Like that moment at the wedding—*Now, who are you?*—it was us all over, a string of botched attempts that, in the end, maybe did amount to something. ♦

ANNALS OF CRIME

LAND OF MAKE-BELIEVE

Zach Horwitz was a mystifying presence on the big screen, until the F.B.I. showed up.

BY EVAN OSNOS

Anyone who visited Zach and Mallory Horwitz in 2019 would have said that they had made it in Hollywood. They lived in a six-million-dollar home on Bolton Road, within walking distance of Beverly Hills; there was a screening room, a thousand-bottle wine cellar, and a cabana laced with flowering vines by the pool. The Horwitzes had hired a celebrity decorator and installed a baby grand piano and framed photographs of Brigitte Bardot and Jack Nicholson. On social media, Zach posted pictures of himself courtside at Lakers games; Mallory shared images of their toddler playing in the California sun. For Mallory's thirtieth birthday, Zach paid the R. & B. artist Miguel to perform for friends at the Nice Guy, a voguish restaurant in West Hollywood.

The couple, college sweethearts from Indiana University, had arrived in California seven years earlier, in search of a new life. They had started the cross-country drive with their dog, Lucy, on New Year's Eve. In L.A., Mallory trained to be a hair stylist, like her mother and grandmother back home in Santa Claus, Indiana. Zach, who had secretly wanted to act ever since he saw his first Broadway play as a child, landed a few tiny parts: he played Demon 3 in one film, an unnamed basketball player in another. He was not quite movie-star handsome, but he had gleaming teeth, an aquiline nose, imposing biceps, and turquoise eyes. For a stage name, he chose Zach Avery.

Although Zach was not an overnight success, bigger roles came soon enough. In 2017, he flew to Serbia for a film directed by Ralph Fiennes, then he was off to Virginia to shoot a movie with the Hollywood veteran Bruce Dern, in which he played opposite Olivia Munn. Before long, he starred in a thriller featuring Brian Cox, who played the patriarch Logan Roy on "Succession." In an interview after the production, Zach praised Cox for "taking me under his wing," and marvelled, with self-flattering deference, "When you're sitting across the table from him, doing scenes, you almost have to pinch yourself and say, 'How is this real?'"

Like many young stars, Zach dabbled in tech investments and started companies to produce and distribute films; he named his enterprises 1inMM, after his favorite saying, "When odds are one in a million, be that one." Eventually, he encouraged Mallory to stop working at the salon. They had forty million dollars in the bank, he told her. Why go to work? All the while, Zach kept in touch with the friends who'd been with him during his rise. He took them to parties by private plane and always paid their way; he even made some of them rich, by dealing them into his businesses. In 2018, during a dinner in Montreal with three old friends from Indiana, one of them proposed a toast to Zach: "You've changed my life, my wife's life, my children's lives."

But even in Hollywood, where professional envy is as ubiquitous as dental veneers, people around Zach were unusually puzzled by the divide between his success and his talent. "He is the worst actor I've ever worked with," a former colleague told me. Sharing a scene with Zach, he said, was like interacting with a banana. The director Michele Civetta, who worked with Zach, told me that he was forced to invent ways to help him unlock emotion; otherwise, it was like "dealing with a dead horse." Audiences reached a similar conclusion. After Zach appeared with Cox, in "Last Moment of Clarity," one reviewer wrote that he delivered "such a dull, unappealing performance that the movie has a void at the center." A viewer of another of his films declared, "Zach Avery's acting was like a cancer to this movie. Every time he was on screen it died a little more. Good god, how did he make it past the auditions?"

Still, many people who encountered Zach thought that he seemed like just another lucky beneficiary of the capricious entertainment business. Gina Dickerson, a real-estate agent who met with him and Mallory, said, "In L.A. more than anywhere else, nobody really ever knows where the money is coming from." Her colleague Tracy Tutor told me, "In Hollywood, the more you fake it, the more people actually buy it. You have the right car? You're wearing the right suit? You know the right people? No one does the diligence."

If anything, Zach struck people as too blandly genial to be anything other than what he appeared. Civetta, the director, noticed that he seemed determined to project wholesome simplicity—"milk and apple pie, his wife, his kids." Tutor, the real-estate agent, who often appears with her clients on a reality show called "Million Dollar Listing Los Angeles," considered casting Zach but concluded that he was too undistinguished to put on TV: "I said to the show, 'This is the most boring, vanilla person.'"

As a teen-ager on the outskirts of Fort Wayne, where subdivisions give way to farmland, Zach Horwitz was an athlete, not a theatre kid. The Carroll High School yearbook featured a picture of him shirtless in the gym, under the headline "Best Bodies." He was popular, but prone to telling fanciful stories that seemed engineered to draw attention. According to a classmate named Steve Clark, Horwitz once told peers that he had met the baseball star Derek Jeter at a mall in Florida, and that Jeter had invited him to dinner. The story seemed ludicrous, but Horwitz was beyond reproach. "He was handsome, and he was a football player, which is to say he was high-school royalty," Clark said.

Horwitz's parents, Susan and Howard, had divorced when he was young. For a time, he lived with his mother and

Horwitz thrived in Hollywood—where, as one acquaintance said, "the more you fake it, the more people actually buy it."

PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY CRISTIANA COUCEIRO

sister in Tampa. During a visit to New York City when he was in grade school, he thrilled to a performance of "Annie Get Your Gun." He asked his mother about the actors, and she explained that they were professionals, paid to entertain the crowd. Back home, he took to memorizing lines from movies like "Forrest Gump" and "Jerry Maguire," and he talked of quitting school to become an actor, but his mother insisted that he get an education. By his sophomore year of high school, they had moved to Indiana; his mother had married Robert Kozlowski, a prosperous manufacturing executive. The family lived comfortably, with a vacation house on a lake.

In 2005, Horwitz started college in Bloomington, majoring in psychology. One day at the gym, he met Jake Wunderlin, who, like him, was a brawny former athlete from Fort Wayne. Unlike Horwitz, though, Wunderlin did not come from money. He was a scholarship kid—a tall, reserved honors student in finance who worked at the campus food court to help pay expenses. They grew close, and Wunderlin joined him on visits to his mother and stepfather, who had a big house near Zionsville, the richest town in Indiana. Horwitz gained a reputation for spending freely on friends, covering late-night drinks and pizza. "He was the one that would pay for everything," Wunderlin told me recently. "He loved it. He never was mad about it, like, 'Are you going to pitch in?'" Joe deAlteris, a business student who had been friends with Wunderlin since kindergarten, grew close with Horwitz, too. "I knew him as the guy who had a ton of family money," he told me. "It felt like every semester he came back with a new car."

Horwitz also had a knack for identifying a need in another person, a point of emotional access. DeAlteris was outgoing, a wide receiver on the Indiana team and a member of the Beta Theta Pi fraternity, but in 2009 his stepfather died, and he was overwhelmed with grief. It was not a subject that he discussed easily with the college-gym crowd, but Horwitz lost his own stepfather around the same time, and the two bonded. At social occasions, Horwitz liked to pose questions that generated moments of self-revelation. He once asked a circle of friends, "How much money is enough? How much would it take in your life to do whatever you want?"

Mallory met Zach at a tailgate party in 2008, just before her twentieth birthday, and was taken with his attentive manner. "Everyone loved him," she recalled. "If there was a homeless person on the street, he'd say, 'Let's give some money.' I felt like I had an extremely deep, rare connection with this person." After graduating, she followed Zach to Chicago. She walked him to classes at the Chicago School of Professional Psychology; when he told her that he was dropping out, after less than a year, she strove to be supportive. He harbored fantasies of getting into the Chicago improv scene, but kept them to himself. Instead, he talked enthusiastically about a job as a salesman, providing accounting software to small businesses.

Wunderlin was working in the Indianapolis office of the wealth-management division at J. P. Morgan, and Horwitz called periodically to compare notes. Among friends, he let it be known that he had inherited money—as much as ten million dollars, some said—and Wunderlin got used to hearing him talk about the "crazy returns" that his mother's financial team had achieved. In fact, the family's money was contested. Horwitz's stepbrother Steven had filed suit against several relatives, alleging that they had shortchanged him on his inheritance. He accused Horwitz's mother, Susan, of fraud and manipulation, suggesting that she may have forged his father's signature on a will while he was sick, in order to secure most of an estate that totalled more than eleven million dollars. Lawyers for Susan called the allegations "false and distorted" and fought the case; in 2011, they reached a confidential settlement.

As the case was nearing resolution, Horwitz called Wunderlin and told him about an enticing opportunity: he had attended a small-business convention, where he'd pitched a chain of fast-casual healthy restaurants—in effect, juice bars with supplements. He said that he'd caught the attention of venture capitalists backed by Howard Schultz, the founder and C.E.O. of Starbucks, who had a sideline as an investor in food startups. (Not long before, a V.C. firm that Schultz co-founded had put almost thirty million dollars into Pinkberry frozen yogurt.) Schultz himself had expressed interest, Horwitz told him. "He said, 'I have a meeting with Howard,'" Wunderlin recalled.

Days later, Horwitz reported back that the meeting had gone well; if he could get a restaurant built, Schultz would consider an investment. Horwitz invited his friend to join the venture, saying, "I need to build a team." Wunderlin wasn't about to leave J. P. Morgan for a juice bar, but then Horwitz put him in contact with Schultz directly. In March, 2011, Wunderlin got a long e-mail from Schultz's account, reflecting on the lessons of building Starbucks and declaring, "I have faith in you. Your team has faith in you." It ended on a note of inspiration: "Be the person that you have always dreamed of becoming, Jake, and all the rest will fall into place." Elated, Wunderlin showed the e-mail to his parents, quit his job, and moved to Chicago.

The restaurant, called FÜL, opened that summer. Mallory, who got her own galvanizing e-mail from Schultz, had signed on, and Horwitz recruited other friends. In the next six weeks, he shared exciting news: undercover test shoppers had visited and approved the restaurant; Schultz was preparing a thirty-million-dollar offer. Better yet, they had received a rival offer from a private-equity firm in Florida.

Though the business consisted of a single storefront, Horwitz gave out grandiose titles, naming himself the C.E.O. and Wunderlin the C.F.O., with a starting salary of two hundred and fifty thousand dollars. He leased an office capacious enough for each of them to have a suite. While Mallory ran the restaurant and Wunderlin plotted its growth, Horwitz spent most days in his office, with the door closed. One afternoon, he invited Wunderlin to join him at the bank, but had him wait in the lobby while he signed documents to prepare for a deal.

Then, all of a sudden, it was gone. The private-equity offer had collapsed, Horwitz said, for complex reasons involving his inheritance, his private investments, and the Securities and Exchange Com-

PREVIOUS PAGE: SOURCE PHOTOGRAPHS FROM ALAMY; GETTY; LIBRARY OF CONGRESS, PRINTS & PHOTOGRAPHS DIVISION, PHOTOGRAPH BY CAROL M. HIGHSMITH [REPRODUCTION NUMBER LC-DIG-HIGHSM-24135]; SHUTTERSTOCK

mission. Worse, he added, when FÜL looked unavailable, Schultz had moved on to another health-food chain. Wunderlin was devastated. Without new investments, the restaurant would be finished by the end of the year. "We were left to fend for ourselves," he said. He began looking for other work.

The only good news, Horwitz said, was that Schultz had offered him a job at Maveron, his venture-capital firm. Mallory later recalled that he showed her a contract for a position at the firm's "Entrepreneur Outreach Program," based in Los Angeles. It would be perfect, he told her: he would visit campuses and small-business conventions, cultivating young strivers. He did not mention that the move would also allow him to pursue his dream of being a star.

Acting is a discouraging business, but Hollywood aspirants have sustained themselves for decades with tales of predecessors who outhustled the competition. Dick Van Dyke danced to stardom in "Bye Bye Birdie" despite having never before taken a class. Eddie Redmayne got cast in "Les Misérables" by claiming that he was a seasoned equestrian, even though he hadn't been on a horse since childhood. Making it through an audition often requires bluffing not just the casting director but also yourself. It's a mentality that Ryan Gosling once called "self-mythologizing"—the ability to face a "hundred other people that are better-looking and more talented and somehow think that you should get the job."

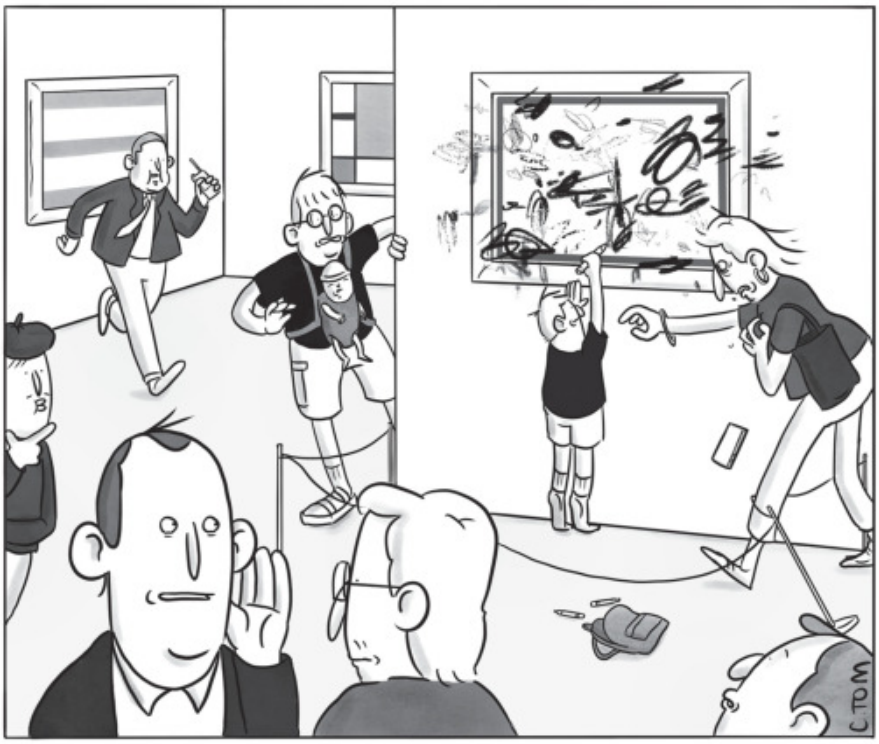
When Horwitz got to Los Angeles, he set about bluffing two audiences: his old friends at home and his potential new friends in Hollywood. Soon after arriving, he wrote on Twitter, "I normally wouldn't name drop BUT I asked H. Schultz this AM what his goal is for me in my role, he simply says, 'Just be good. Don't stink.'" Before long, though, he started telling Mallory that he was bored with his job and talking about shifting his attention to acting. "I'm, like, 'O.K., if this is going to make you happy, do what you want to do—as a hobby,'" she recalled. He tried acting classes and auditions. Then, when he struggled to get parts, he changed tack. Ever since Warren Beatty produced "Bonnie and Clyde," it has been common for accomplished actors to develop movies and then star in them. Horwitz wondered, Why can't I produce, too? He befriended two brothers, Julio and Diego Hallivis, who were looking to establish themselves in the film industry. Diego, who wore his hair in a tall black pompadour, was a fledgling director. Julio, wiry and intense, ran the business side. Horwitz recruited them for 1inMM Productions to make low-budget independent films—essentially B movies in which he might star. He leased office space in Culver City and three black Mercedes coupes for them to drive to meetings. When Horwitz wasn't around, Julio spoke scathingly about him. An associate recalled that he often said, "He's such a terrible actor. But he's the money guy. He has family money, and he knows rich people."

Horwitz had arrived in L.A. at a time of unusual opportunity. Five years before, Netflix had started streaming films and television shows, and, as Amazon worked to keep up, the two companies competed for talent and content. By 2019, Netflix would be spending more than twelve billion dollars a year on programming. Disney launched Disney+, and WarnerMedia created HBO Max. All told, there were more than two hundred and fifty online video services in America, feeding a seemingly inexhaustible demand. Money was coursing through the industry, the *Times* reported: "Florists, caterers, set decorators, chauffeurs, hair stylists, headhunters—it's gravy train time."

In March, 2013, Horwitz announced a partnership to buy the rights to cheap movies and distribute them to the Latin American divisions of Netflix, HBO, and other platforms. His new partner, Gustavo Montaudon, was well suited to the endeavor: he had spent decades at Twentieth Century Fox, distributing content across Latin America. The deal was covered in the trade press, helping to secure a transformation of Horwitz's image. The struggling actor with a failed juice bar was identified, in *Variety*, as "the entrepreneur behind fitness-driven lifestyle brand FÜL." (Some of his marketing materials went further, describing FÜL as a "multi-million dollar, multi-pronged fitness brand" with "seven locations" and "apparel sold in Target, Dick's Sporting Goods and Sports Authority.")

One of the first people Horwitz approached with his venture was Jake Wunderlin. By the spring of 2014, Wunderlin was in Chicago, working as a trader. He had just received a bonus of thirty-five thousand dollars, and he was engaged to be married. He and Horwitz remained friends, but they rarely talked business anymore, until Horwitz started dropping hints that Schultz was backing his work in the movie business. "Zach said, 'I can let you in on a deal,'" Wunderlin told me. It was small by his usual standards, Horwitz said, but, if Wunderlin could put up thirty-seven thousand dollars, he could make nine thousand dollars in ninety days. The contract showed

"Would you like for me to talk to the posse when they get here?"



"My five-year-old would never do that."

• •

that Horwitz was selling Sony the rights to a Mexican rom-com called "Deseo," described in the official summary as "A succession of erotic encounters weaved into a daisy chain of delightful sensuality."

Wunderlin had recovered from the failure of the juice bar, but he was still wary: "I said, 'I can't lose this money. This is everything that I've ever saved.'" Horwitz persuaded him by pledging his own assets in case anything went wrong. The deal went through as promised; Wunderlin got his money, which he put toward a down payment on a house. He was hooked.

That fall, he flew to Los Angeles to be a groomsman at Zach and Mallory's wedding, at the Four Seasons. Wunderlin was awed by his friend's new life: "He was doing three-hundred-thousand-dollar deals."

Back in Chicago, Wunderlin sat on a roof deck one night with some of their other college friends, including deAlteris, who was working in private equity. He asked if they wanted to pool their money on a larger film deal. "None of us had the gift of inheritance or anything like that," he told me. "All of us were focussed on what's next in banking or private wealth or sales and trading. We were all trying to figure out how to be successful." They agreed to buy into a series of deals, and got lucrative returns, often twenty per cent or higher. Soon, they started taking out loans to fund more of Horwitz's investments, and thought of quitting their jobs to do it full time. DeAlteris said, "We're getting paid on time. Real cash. Without fail."

Before long, they were encouraging their parents to put money in. DeAlteris's mother, a widow and a retired physician's assistant, invested forty thousand dollars. Wunderlin's parents put up half their retirement savings. Within two years, the college friends had profited on twenty-seven of Horwitz's movie deals. To handle the business, four of them formed a company—called JJMT Capital, for the initials of their first names—and started bringing in money from outsiders, including wealthy investors on Chicago's North Shore. "People were banging down our door—'I hear you guys have this great opportunity. Do you have any room for me?'" deAlteris said.

When Horwitz visited Chicago, he resumed his old conspicuous generosity. At a pizza parlor, he tipped the server two thousand dollars. "She came back out in tears," Wunderlin recalled. At night clubs, Horwitz might pick up a forty-thousand-dollar check and leave another thirty thousand for a tip. As the party swirled around him, he would lean back in silence, with a blissfully satisfied look.

His friends felt a tinge of satisfaction, too; they were proud of the money that they made for their parents and friends. None of them knew much about the entertainment business, but they thought they knew due diligence. "I would pepper him with questions, and he would come back with answers to everything," deAlteris said. They showed the contracts to industry experts, and Horwitz arranged for a member of their team to speak by phone with his main contact at HBO. Horwitz was always available to answer questions, but he told investors never to contact the streaming platforms directly, because he had signed nondisclosure agreements. "I've got basically three relationships—HBO, Netflix, and Sony," he'd say. "If you guys go around me, you're going to blow up my business."

In fact, there was no business. Horwitz was not buying or selling movie rights. He had got his hands on a few distribution contracts, then copy-and-pasted them in Microsoft Word to make hundreds of fakes, forging signatures of executives that he found on LinkedIn. As new investors bought in, he paid off earlier investors with the proceeds—a Ponzi scheme. (Montaudon, his partner, has not been charged with any wrongdoing.) He sent out fake bank statements and ginned up bogus e-mails and text messages from HBO and Netflix, often using apps to send fake messages to himself at predetermined times. He arranged for a female accomplice, who has never been identified, to impersonate the contact at HBO. This kind of deception requires relentless discipline; Bernie Madoff insisted that every screw he might see on his yacht have its head turned in the same direction. Horwitz, too, had a fastidious streak. He held to a rigid schedule, growing upset if he couldn't fit in a workout before noon, and he calmed himself by insuring that everything around him was in the proper place. He never went more than two weeks between haircuts.

His fraud rested on perceptions of Hollywood as a money factory—an idea that reached back to the nineteen-

thirties, when Louis Mayer, the co-founder of M-G-M, was the highest-paid executive in the country. (Nineteen of the next twenty-five highest-paid execs also ran Hollywood studios.) The reality is that hits are unpredictable and the business is clannish and opaque—"a closed world," as one longtime industry executive told me recently, "with its own language, own rules, own economics and caste system." The finances are obscured by "Hollywood accounting," invented by studios to shield revenues from inspection by stars, writers, and others who want a cut. (The screenwriter for "Men in Black" has said that the film earned more than half a billion dollars, but that the studio refuses to declare it profitable.) And yet, for all that volatility, movies have a charismatic appeal for the distant investor—the proverbial dentist from Omaha, lured by the unspoken prospect that he will somehow end up clinking glasses with Tom Hanks. "People try to buy their way in," the executive said, "and what happens is they lose a lot of money and still get kicked to the curb."

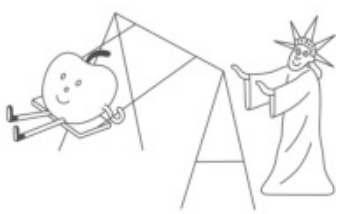
It's tempting to wonder why Horwitz's friends in Chicago thought they had found a vast source of revenue that people in Hollywood had somehow overlooked. But they didn't think they had beaten the insiders; they thought their friend had become an insider. DeAlteris said, "It's an old boys' club, and it seemed like we just so happened to be old boys with somebody who knew some of the old boys."

As their partnership flourished, their personal lives became more entwined; they attended one another's weddings and took joint vacations. In 2016, Horwitz flew Wunderlin by chartered jet to Miami for a mutual friend's bachelor party that stretched for a week. Late one night, the two set off from shore on paddleboards, pausing in the water to reflect on their good fortune. Wunderlin recalls that Horwitz said, "I have more money than I know what to do with. It's like Monopoly money."

By funnelling cash into his production company, Horwitz had provided himself with a string of minor roles, including that of a murderous psychopath in a short film made in homage to the Joker, and that of a victim of a home invasion in a movie called "Trespassers." But, after five years in Hollywood, he seemed to be confined to B movies, until he devised a way to get closer to real stardom.

In June, 2017, Horwitz co-founded a company called Rogue Black, with Andrew Levitas, a filmmaker and a sculptor who had directed Amy Adams, Jennifer Hudson, and other prominent actors. (Levitas, who is not alleged to have been aware of Horwitz's scheme, declined to comment.) In the next four years, according to court documents, Horwitz poured about twenty million dollars into Rogue Black, and Levitas arranged investments in eight movies, including "The White Crow," directed by Ralph Fiennes, and "Last Moment of Clarity," with Brian Cox. Horwitz received parts in four of them.

Some were so small that he was barely visible onscreen, but still he could claim proximity to famous actors. In 2018, he hired a publicist, Nedda Soltani, who had represented cast members of "Breaking Bad" and the "Real Housewives" franchise. He gave her pictures of himself on the red carpet at the Golden Globes. (He had never attended the awards ceremony, but a photo outside an after-party made it appear that he had. Soltani told me, "No one talks about that, but you could get a hotel room and wear your tux and just sort of be in the mix.") When she asked for a biography, he conjured a story of humble Midwestern roots: an injury had kept him out of the N.F.L., so he supported himself as a door-to-door salesman before making his way to Hollywood. (In truth, Horwitz had played intramural football in college.) Soltani's boyfriend was from Indiana, so Horwitz felt instantly relatable. "There was something about his eyes. He smelled good, his haircut was nice, he had a nice watch. He made you believe," she said. "We built this little bio on him, and that became my pitch: Johnny Football turns to acting, rags to riches."



The outlets that Soltani persuaded to feature her client were mostly obscure online venues—the kind, she said, that people solicit articles in "just to post them on their Instagram stories and say, 'Look at me.'" But investors researching Horwitz could now find unquestioning recitations of his story. In an interview on AfterBuzz TV, a YouTube channel focussed on "Hollywood's rising talent," the host mentioned his "burgeoning career in football, which was derailed," and asked about his association with Fiennes. Horwitz warmly recalled showing up for filming in Belgrade. "Walk on set, he's in the back of this auditorium, and he says, 'Zach!'" He described Fiennes's avuncular instructions: "I loved what you did there. Bring *exactly* the same thing, but, if you turn just a little bit to the right, the light is going to hit you in a way that's going to look amazing." (Fiennes's publicist said that she was unable to reach her client for comment.)

Hollywood has long had an ambivalent relationship with facts. The screenwriter William Goldman once described overhearing a producer tout so many bogus figures while working the phone that he finally had to cover the mouthpiece and ask, "Which lie did I tell?" In time, Horwitz had deceived so many friends and investors that he had to discourage them from talking to one another; he was always "building moats," as one put it. He told an associate that he had sold FÜL for eleven million dollars but warned him not to mention it to Mallory, claiming that she had a small-town discomfort with people knowing their business.

Yet Horwitz never stopped stoking belief. Late one night at a club, he showed an investor named Craig Cole a string of text messages, telling him that Ted Sarandos, the C.E.O. of Netflix, was seeking long-term rights to the full library of films that he distributed. When the fake Sarandos asked what would secure the deal, Horwitz replied, "The zeros." Moments later, a text came back with an offer in the hundreds of millions. Horwitz slumped to the floor, in a pantomime of triumph and gratitude. In "Bad Actor," a forthcoming documentary about the case, Cole recalls that Horwitz started crying: "He

says, 'Craig, we made it! We did it!'" Cole wept, too; when he got home that night, he told his girlfriend that they were set for life.

Like other accomplished swindlers, Horwitz excelled by knowing his audience. In Chicago, he was a wealthy heir who flew private jets to movie shoots. In L.A., he was a plucky football talent selling door-to-door. (A surprising number of people he dealt with in California mentioned how good he smelled.) His difficulty showing emotion, a detriment onscreen, turned out to be useful in pitch meetings. Edgar Allan Poe, in an essay on swindling, noted the power of nonchalance—the kind of take-it-or-leave-it indifference that conveys credibility—and Horwitz often succeeded by convincing investors that he didn't much care whether they bought in. "Remember Zach does not need any money from us," one wrote to another in 2017.

That June, Horwitz met investors at the Four Seasons in Beverly Hills. Over dinner, he sat beside Jim Russell, a Las Vegas steel executive, and, according to court documents, said that he had made some twenty million dollars the previous year. Russell was concerned when Horwitz insisted that his business records were too confidential to share, and later sent an e-mail to one of his partners describing the evasion as a "Red Flag!!" But the partner dismissed the concern, writing, "This is the goose that lays the golden egg." Russell relented, and his group put in another five million.

By 2019, Horwitz even seemed to be improving his acting. In May, he showed up in Norfolk, Virginia, to shoot a movie called "The Gateway." It was understood that his financial support guaranteed him a place onscreen. "This is truly not uncommon," Civetta, the director, told me. "I've heard countless stories from friends who've made films. It's, like, 'Oh, yeah, if you want half a million dollars, this wealthy industrialist's daughter has to have a secondary role.'"

Horwitz was assigned the role of a volatile ex-con named Mike, but in rehearsals he got timid and self-conscious; his voice went high and his mannerisms grew labored. So Civetta contacted a nearby jail and arranged for Horwitz to spend the night, talking to inmates and being searched and fingerprinted. When he returned, he showed a new ability to "change tonalities," Civetta said. "He could go places relatively quickly in terms of diabolical rage." When the movie came out, *Variety* observed, "Probably the best turn is by Avery," who "makes potentially cardboard villain Mike into a frighteningly credible sociopath."

As the end of 2019 approached, Horwitz had raised three hundred and fifty-eight million dollars in the past year. He was running what scholars of confidence games call an "affinity fraud," built around trust and personal connections. He found wealthy investors—in Napa Valley, Orange County, Las Vegas, and Chicago—who then spread the word on the tennis court and the charity circuit. But every network has limits, and the arithmetic of a Ponzi scheme is unforgiving. When you run out of new investors, the mechanism begins to collapse. After Thanksgiving, Horwitz fell behind on his payments for the first time.

To fend off concerns, Horwitz blamed the delay on the big media platforms and promised a speedy resolution. On January 4th, though, Wunderlin and deAlteris arrived at his house on Bolton Road to figure out what was happening. For three days, Horwitz walked them through documents; he had thousands of pages of fake contracts and e-mails and bank statements, which he presented calmly. "Cool as a cucumber," deAlteris recalled. The possibility of fraud never occurred to him, deAlteris said: "I thought it was wild disorganization that he had so much money coming into his bank account." The friends went back to Chicago feeling relieved.

But Horwitz fell further behind, and he gave more excuses. COVID-19 was disrupting business; HBO was reorganizing its operation; Netflix was auditing its distribution deals. He needed time with his family, he said—Mallory had recently given birth to their second child. All the while, he kept up his patter. In October, he texted an investor, "just heard from HBO," and then passed along a fake e-mail from executives asking for a "week grace period." He commiserated: "always something w them."

Near the end of 2020, Horwitz bought one last bit of time by saying that money was piling up at Freeway Entertainment, an account-management firm, and would soon be distributed. But the delays were becoming untenable for his friends in Chicago. People who had given them money to invest were threatening to sue. One was Marty Kaplan, a financier who, along with partners and family members, had ten million dollars at risk. According to Kaplan's lawyer, deAlteris had reassured him by citing his friendship with Horwitz, adding, "I wouldn't be able to pay rent if something went wrong."

In all, Horwitz owed the Chicago group a hundred and sixty-five million dollars. He had got his lawyer at the prominent firm K&L Gates to send a letter warning them that the details of the deals were "strictly confidential," but on February 23rd Wunderlin and deAlteris decided to call Freeway to check the account balance. Wunderlin made the call from his home in Chicago; he patched in deAlteris, at his kitchen table across town. Horwitz had given them a copy of his contract with Freeway, as well as statements showing a growing balance. DeAlteris flipped through the paperwork to find the account number, then read it aloud. The representative paused and asked to hear the name again. The firm had no record of a Zach Horwitz, he said. DeAlteris grew impatient: "I'm looking at the fucking bank statement! You clearly misheard me."

By the time they hung up, they could see an impending catastrophe. "All the dominoes fell after that one," deAlteris said. Wunderlin, who had been pacing during the call, dropped to his knees. He had been the first of the friends to put money into Horwitz's scheme, followed by his family and then by outsiders who contributed a harrowing sum. When I asked him about it more than two years later, he fell silent and struggled not to cry. "I still can't really talk about it without doing this," he said.

That afternoon, their lawyer contacted the F.B.I. to report a suspected fraud. Other investors were reaching similar conclusions. On March 15th, F.B.I. agents came to deAlteris's house to record a call with Horwitz. Wunderlin was there, too. On the phone, Horwitz ran through his usual reassurances, until Wunderlin cut in: "Here's the problem with that. That's not fucking true. We spoke to Freeway.

There's no money in that account. Where in the fuck is our money?"

There was a long pause—long enough that they had to ask Horwitz if he was still on the line. Finally, he said, "I think the lawyers should do the talking." Wunderlin couldn't restrain himself: "You're not going to tell me where any of the money is? What did you do with it?" He talked about his mother's savings, his father's savings, but Horwitz stayed silent. Wunderlin sensed that he might have realized he was being recorded. "It was like talking to the wall," he said.

In L.A., Horwitz's friends noticed that he seemed paranoid, worrying that he was being monitored through their phones. When they asked what was going on, he evaded the question, saying that he didn't want to expose them to trouble.

According to court documents, Horwitz had been using Adderall and Xanax and drinking heavily, sometimes staying up most of the night. Mallory was worried about his behavior, but she believed that he had just been having trouble recouping money that HBO and Netflix owed him. They had begun to talk about a simpler life—maybe somewhere quieter, like Nashville or Austin. By spring, they had put their house on the market and found a buyer. The offer was set to be officially accepted on April 6th.

That morning, before dawn, Mallory was asleep beside Zach and their three-year-old when she awoke to banging on the front door. From down the hall, she could hear their baby crying, and she ran to soothe him. Looking through the window, she saw F.B.I. agents, guns drawn, and heard them shouting Zach's name. Mallory rushed downstairs with the baby in her arms and opened the door. Agents streamed in. Zach, now on the stairs, asked if he could put on a shirt. The agents refused, and walked him out onto Bolton Road. John Verrastro, the agent in charge, was startled by Horwitz's behavior. He had come to expect defendants in white-collar cases to express something during their arrests—bewilderment, outrage, despair—but Horwitz showed none of that. "He didn't seem surprised," Verrastro said.

Mallory quickly filed for divorce. According to her filings, their joint accounts had been frozen by the authorities; the only money in her name was a checking account with a balance of $100.75. Horwitz was charged with thirteen counts of fraud, in the service of what prosecutors called an "intricate illusion"—the largest Ponzi scheme in Hollywood history. He had raised more than six hundred and ninety million dollars by deceiving hundreds of investors, beginning with his closest friends. A woeful actor onscreen turned out to have been an astonishingly convincing performer in life.

The extent of the lie was almost too great for Mallory to grasp. Her husband never had any deals with HBO or Netflix. He had never even met Howard Schultz. When Zach left for late-night meetings, there were no meetings. The only thing real was his slender imprint on the screen. In her filings, she wrote, "I loved him. I idolized him. Zach is a masterful manipulator and liar and brainwashed and gaslit me into believing he was this perfect man, something he made everyone around him feel. Only a sociopath can live the sort of deceptive life Zach lived for nearly ten years." Mallory's father bought her and the children one-way tickets to Indiana. On May 1st, she flew home.

Horwitz got out on bail: a million dollars, posted by his mother. For a week or two, the case made headlines worldwide, but he stayed out of sight, telling his kids that he was working as a dog-walker. Among people who knew him, the reaction that I encountered most often was disbelief that he was bright enough to manage such a scheme. "I don't know how the fuck he was capable of it," one of his closest friends told me. Another associate said, "If you had asked me if this man even had Photoshop downloaded to his computer, I would've told you, 'Absolutely not.'" More than a few surmised that his Latin American distribution network must have been a front for a drug cartel.

The government didn't agree. The S.E.C. named him as the sole defendant, noting that he alone had controlled the bank accounts at 1inMM. When I told Verrastro, the F.B.I. agent, that many people were perplexed nobody else was charged, he said he couldn't go into detail about that decision. But he hastened to add, "The one thing that's clear in this case is there was no one above him. He is the main guy."

As with many frauds, the prosecution triggered a series of lawsuits, as investors fought over the remaining assets and accused one another, as well as various banks and law firms, of failing to spot the crime. Alexander Loftus, a lawyer representing some of the investors, filed suits against Horwitz's friends in Chicago. "When you're acting like a broker, it's your job to see if this is good or not before you sell it," he told me. Ultimately, Loftus said, the friends in Chicago agreed to give up more than nine million dollars—though they maintain that they acted in good faith. "My family members who trusted me, they're not savvy," deAlteris said. "I thought that I was being fairly

"Save the empty cardboard boxes in case I need them one day!"

objective with how I approached it. My family members weren't. One chip became two chips, which became all their chips." Their lawyer, Brian Michael, told me, "It's inconceivable that they would've questioned a fraud that was rooted in a friendship long before Zach went to Hollywood, that they allowed their own families to participate in."

In the end, there was surprisingly little money to recoup. A receiver, appointed by the court to hunt for assets, reported that an "unknown" sum might be "hidden." But lawyers involved in the case told me that Horwitz expended most of the money keeping the scheme going. The rest he used to pay for jets and yachts and the pursuit of stardom: prosecutors listed $605,000 to Mercedes-Benz and Audi, $174,000 to party planners, $54,600 for a "luxury watch subscription" service. Six months after his arrest, confronted by extensive evidence of his deceptions, Horwitz pleaded guilty.

On the afternoon of February 14, 2022, I attended the sentencing in a federal courtroom in L.A. Horwitz arrived early, in a tailored blue suit and brown wingtips. His mother and other relatives filled the rows behind the defense table. Prosecutors declared, in a written argument to the judge, "It is difficult to conceive a white-collar crime more egregious." They noted that Horwitz had begun his scheme by "betraying the trust of his own friends, people who lowered their guard because they could not possibly imagine that someone they had known for years would unflinchingly swindle them and their families out of their life savings."

Victims had been invited to submit descriptions of the impact on their lives. One investor, identified as a sixty-four-year-old who lost $1.4 million, described coming out of retirement to pay for food and shelter: "I cry every day and have stopped seeing friends or family because of the shame of this financial loss and have a now severe distrust of other human beings. If it was not for my spiritual beliefs, I would have committed suicide." Another wrote, "I am the mother of a 46-year-old special needs daughter. . . . I will never be able to earn what has been taken from me and my daughter but the emotional damage . . . is even greater."

Some victims chose to speak in person. Robert Henny, a lanky screenwriter with two young children, stepped to the microphone. "I don't live an extravagant life style," he said. "My career could hit bumps and we'd be O.K. Even after my wife's cancer diagnosis, we were O.K. For fifteen years, we lived frugally." They had lost $1.8 million in the scheme. "For the first time, we are not O.K. I don't know if we ever will be," he said.

When it was Horwitz's turn to speak, he stood before the judge, his shoulders hunched and hands clasped. "I became the exact opposite person from who I wanted to be," he said. He wept and paused to collect himself. "I am destroyed and haunted every day and night by the harm that I have caused others." He asked the judge for a lenient sentence, one that would allow him to "return to my young boys when they are still boys."

The judge, Mark C. Scarsi, was unmoved. He applied the maximum sentence that prosecutors had requested: twenty years in prison. (Elizabeth Holmes, the founder of the disgraced biotech startup Theranos, was sentenced to eleven years; Sam Bankman-Fried, the billionaire founder of FTX, is serving twenty-five.) As the sentence was announced, Horwitz stared into the distance and then up at the ceiling.

After the courtroom emptied out, Henny stopped at the bathroom. As he was preparing to leave, the door opened and Horwitz walked in. "We look at each other," Henny recalled. "And he goes, 'Hey, I just want to tell you, I'm so sorry.'" Henny, who is six feet four, towered over him. "You took everything from us," he said.

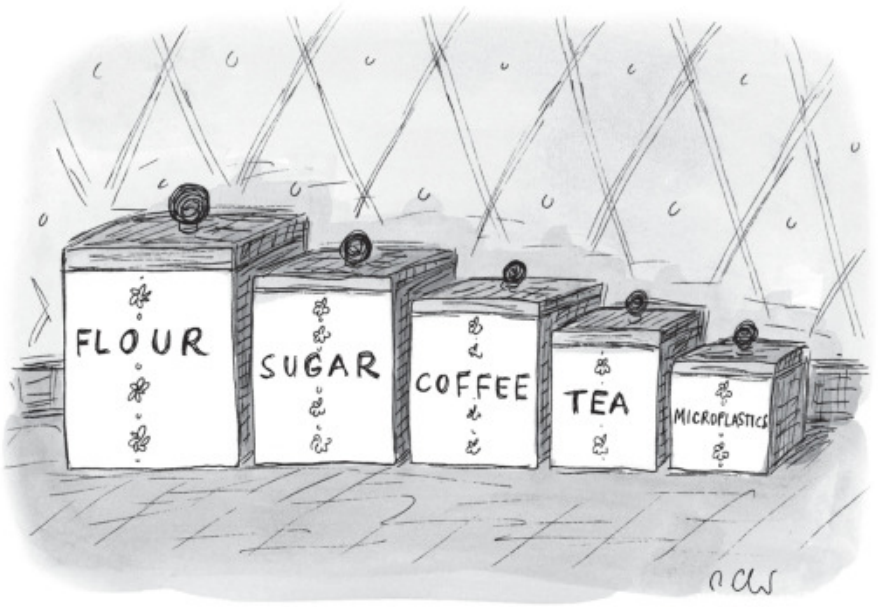
One of Horwitz's relatives poked his head in the door and said, "Hey, are we all good here?"

Horwitz reassured him, "Yeah, we're O.K.," and the door closed again.

Henny could have asked him why he did it, or how he lived with himself. But, as a writer, he was interested in only one thing: "How did you think you were going to get out of this? What was your endgame?"

Horwitz paused, and then said, "I didn't have one."

Until the end, Horwitz seemed to have believed that one of his identities was going to save him—actor, producer, investor. Something had to work. Fake it till you make it.



One morning last November, I took a cab out to the Federal Correctional Institute at Terminal Island. It sits on a peninsula at the far end of an industrial strip, south of Los Angeles, jutting into the waters of the harbor. The facility is surrounded by barbed wire and gun towers, but tauntingly close to the city. Walking inside, I could hear seagulls and the distant rumble of cranes on the docks.

I had exchanged letters and e-mails with Horwitz since his sentencing, in which he agreed to keep the "lines of communication open" but wouldn't say "anything specific." He seemed more

interested in projecting a narrative of rehabilitation. He described a shift in his mind-set and said, "I am healthier for it every single day." He imagined teaching a class to fellow-inmates, called "Emotional Intelligence Through Acting," that would give them a "safe space to express vulnerability."

I had stopped by the prison hoping to get Horwitz to speak more frankly about his crimes. In the visiting room, he wore a khaki shirt tucked into khaki pants, his hair cropped. He was relaxed and unfailingly polite. But, for all his talk of expressing vulnerability, he was still unwilling to answer questions on the record. In an e-mail later, he told me that publicity doesn't help, because "all the wounds keep getting ripped open and additional salt being poured on top."

I was wary of whatever he might tell me, in any case. He had always been conscious of his ability to persuade. At family Thanksgivings, when relatives went around the table saying what made them grateful, he treated it as a "performance," he wrote later, prepping an answer and "artificially manufacturing it in order to get the sought after result."

In prison, Horwitz had access to a computer for fifteen minutes at a time. He used it to start a blog, which he called Be That 1, a new variation on his favorite slogan about beating the odds. He offered occasional glimpses of his thinking during the scam—how he'd been "obsessed with belief in a superior life that existed just beyond my grasp"; how he had "put on the smile" despite "living an absolute hell," with the knowledge that his life was "all bullsh*t"; how he had portrayed "utmost confidence to everyone" to mask "deep, unresolved internal insecurities." He recalled the feeling of living a "fabricated life that I had forced myself to believe was reality." To sustain the delusion, he developed self-protective habits—"avoiding phone calls . . . avoid opening mail . . . avoid checking e-mails"—even though "on some level it was simply denial of what was inevitably coming."

He also indulged in the language of self-help. Prison, he wrote, was a "journey" of "mending the wounds" and finding "genuine emotion." People he had tricked were infuriated by the blog; it seemed glib or, perhaps, strategic—a way assembling material for a relaunch of his life after prison. "I think he wants to be the next version of that guy from 'Wolf of Wall Street,'" Mallory told me. "He loved that movie and watched it over and over again."

Even from prison, Horwitz couldn't seem to control his instinct for imposture and assimilation. Reading his blog, the producers of the documentary "Bad Actor" came upon lines that sounded out of place; they turned out to be copied from "Never Finished," a self-help

book by David Goggins, a former Navy SEAL. Goggins wrote that "humility is the antidote to self-pity. It keeps you rooted in reality and your emotions in check." Horwitz had published that passage in his own voice, changing only "you" and "your" to "me" and "my."

In Horwitz's fantasies, you hear echoes of the long tradition of American artifice: of Napoleon Hill, who wrote in "Think and Grow Rich" that "whatever the mind of men can conceive and believe, it can achieve," and of the clergyman Norman Vincent Peale, who declared, "As you act and persevere in acting, so you tend to become"—a principle impressed on a young real-estate scion named Donald Trump when his family attended Peale's sermons. At times, this tendency still seems strong enough to overwhelm the systems that we've developed to punish it. Even after Elizabeth Holmes was convicted, she voiced a belief that lies are just a stop on the way to truth. Asked what she thought would've happened if she had not courted so much attention, she told an interviewer, "We would've seen through our vision."

In my conversations with people who knew Horwitz, many wondered why he risked so much. If it was all for money and fame, why not get out before it became so destructive? I concluded that he was seeking something harder to attain. He spent years performing the parts of a life he desired—the chosen protégé, the coveted talent, the loyal friend. He needed applause, from the server at a pizza restaurant and from his friends toasting him at dinner.

In the end, Horwitz got fame only where most people would want it least: from the true-crime audience. After his arrest, a commenter on Reddit wrote, "This is 100% going to be a movie." Another agreed: "I'd watch the shit out of this." Before long, Horwitz's scheme was the focus of podcasts with names like "Scamfluencers," "Crime and Wine," and "Oh My Fraud." His story was re-created for episodes of "The Con," on ABC, and "American Greed," on CNBC.

But most of the people who had worked with him were eager to forget him. When I wrote to a Hollywood veteran, asking about the experience, the response was "Your e-mail is something that I have dreaded in the back of my head for a long time." The traces of his Hollywood life have been scattered or effaced. The house on Bolton Road was sold and the contents auctioned off. A poster with the slogan that inspired the name of his scheme went for forty-five dollars. And, despite all that Horwitz risked to make it on the big screen, his acting is hard to find. In "The White Crow," his appearance was edited down to half a second. When "The Gateway" came out, in 2021, he was nowhere on the posters, and Olivia Munn never mentioned him on the press tour. When Brian Cox published a memoir, the movie he made with Zach Avery did not even make the index.

Looking back through his hours of effortful acting, there is one scene that stands out. It's in "Trespassers," the home-invasion movie, when his character admits to his wife that he has cheated on her. On set, the director, frustrated with his attempts to get Horwitz to perform, finally told him to ignore the script and let himself go: "Just strip it away. Throw away the line. Just tell her." After a pause, Horwitz gave himself over to a few seconds of unconcealed feeling. "I fucked up," he said. "I'm a piece of shit!" He sounded present and broken and strangely relieved. For a moment, you could almost forget that Horwitz was acting. ♦

LETTER FROM BERLIN

THE *STASI* FILES

Piecing together the secrets of East Germany's past.

BY BURKHARD BILGER

The man who stopped Salomea Genin on the street in West Berlin, on that August morning in 1961, smiled as if he knew her. He was a "rather handsome gentleman," she recalls, though he would have been hard to pick out in a crowd. He brought her greetings from East Berlin, from a woman whom Genin had met on a recent visit there—a secretary in one of the Arab embassies. He wondered if Genin would like to join him for coffee the next day. Genin was quite sure that she had never seen the man before in her life. Given her history, there was a good chance that he was an East German spy. She agreed to the meeting without hesitation.

Genin longed to live in East Berlin. She was born in Berlin in 1932, before the city was divided, but was forced to flee with her family at the age of six. The Genins were Jewish. One night in 1937, a boarder who was living with Salomea and her two sisters and her mother—her parents were divorced—denounced them to the local police. Salomea's sister Franziska was sleeping with an Aryan, the boarder said, in violation of race ordinances. Franziska left for Australia two weeks later, but the rest of the family had to stay back. Salomea's father had been imprisoned at Buchenwald as an *arbeitsscheuer Jude*—an indolent Jew—after being hospitalized with syphilis. When he was finally released, after the Jewish community helped Salomea's mother pay a hundred marks in bail, he escaped to Shanghai. The rest of the family made their way to Melbourne in May of 1939, four months before the war began.

Salomea was a solitary, rootless child. Her mother had never shown much interest in her—she only got pregnant with Salomea to try to save her marriage, she later admitted—and her mother's boyfriend showed even less. When Salomea was eleven, she was shipped off to a boarding school for seven months. It wasn't until the following year, when her sister Renia let her tag along to a Communist-youth-group meeting, that Salomea began to feel at home. The Party was antifascist, pro-union, and radically egalitarian. Its meetings were fired with optimism and a fierce sense of belonging—everything Salomea had been missing at home. Soon, she was handing out leaflets and selling copies of *Youth Voice* in downtown Melbourne, reading Lenin ("Marx is too complicated," she was told), and giving speeches on the steps of the Commonwealth Bank.

"Genin is a security risk," the Australian Security Intelligence Organization concluded in 1951. It was the first entry in what grew to be a voluminous file. Later reports would describe her as an "unscrupulous and a fanatical Communist" and her mother and her as "a couple of mean, contemptible witches." Genin was working as a secretary at a government-owned aircraft factory, the first report noted, but that could be easily remedied: "Her dismissal should not entail great administrative difficulties." Three years later, having been sacked from a succession of jobs, Genin came to a dramatic conclusion. She had been to East Berlin a few years earlier, for the World Festival of Youth and Students for Peace, and had been exhilarated by the stirring rhetoric she'd heard. This was where she belonged, she thought: at the forefront of the Communist struggle, fighting to keep her birthplace free from fascism. On April 15, 1954, she boarded the passenger ship Otranto in Melbourne and returned to the country that had nearly killed her.

Or so she hoped. When Genin arrived in West Berlin and applied for residency in the German Democratic Republic her request was ignored. The East Germans thought she might be a Western spy—"They didn't believe all my enthusiasm," Genin recalls. The West Germans thought she was spying for the East. Each side sent agents to follow her. "At 10.00 A.M. surveillance was

Sacks filled with ripped-up Stasi records, held

in an archive in Germany. Destroying the files was exhausting work; reassembling them has been even more challenging.

PHOTOGRAPH BY INGMAR BJÖRN NOLTING

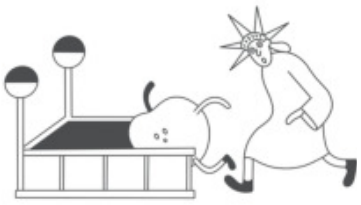
interrupted because two suspicious persons, presumably counter-observers, were in the vicinity," the East German Staatssicherheitsdienst, or Stasi, reported on December 18, 1954. Genin was twenty-two years old, her file noted. She had "a stocky, powerful build, conspicuously strong haunches, a full round face, long nose, and dark blond hair." She wore secondhand clothes, could seem shy and unsettled, and rarely made eye contact. Yet she had a "pronounced sex drive" and was "not averse to men." All of this seems, in retrospect, unremarkable for a woman in her early twenties, alone in a foreign country and well aware that she might be under surveillance. But it worried the Stasi. They gave her the code name Stomper.

Genin spent the next seven years trying to gain their trust. "The way I'm built, the higher the barrier, the more I'm convinced that I belong there," she says. She moved to London for three years and joined the British Communist Party. She returned to West Berlin and wrote articles for the *Democratic German Report*, a socialist newsletter published by John Peet, a former Reuters bureau chief who had defected to East Germany from the United Kingdom. Finally, in 1961, after having coffee with the rather handsome gentleman who'd stopped her on the street, Genin got her wish: she became a Stasi informant, and later a citizen of the G.D.R.

The agent's report after the meeting left one question unanswered, though even some of the Stasi must have asked it: Why would anyone want to move to East Germany?

Dictatorships depend on the willing. They can't rule by compulsion alone. People support them to gain power or advance their careers, because they like giving orders or take comfort in receiving them. They act on their prejudice or pocketbook, religious beliefs or political ideals at first, then on their fear. They may not realize what they're supporting until it's too late. In 1953, less than a year before Genin came to Germany, more than a million East Germans took part in strikes and demonstrations across the country. They were protesting low wages and inhuman production quotas, fuel shortages and rising food prices. Within days, Soviet forces had crushed the uprising, marching on more than fifty cities and arresting some fifteen thousand protesters. In East Berlin, Soviet tanks charged into unarmed crowds and troops fired on civilians.

Genin didn't believe any of it. Those stories were just capitalist lies, she thought. Like the American socialists who admired Stalin in the nineteen-thirties, or the Russians who support the



war in Ukraine today, she accepted the government's version of events. The Army wasn't attacking innocent civilians in Berlin; it was protecting them from totalitarianism. The workers' uprising was really a fascist coup. By 1954, when Genin arrived in West Berlin, more than thirty thousand East Germans were fleeing across the border into the West each month. According to Genin, this was another example of the West bleeding the East dry—luring its citizens with false hopes of wealth and ease. When the Wall went up across Berlin, seven years later, she was all for it. The East Germans had to protect themselves from bad influences, she thought. The Wall wasn't meant to keep them in; it was meant to keep their enemies out.

When Genin finally moved to East Berlin, on May 16, 1963, her first thought was "Home at last." She stayed in a dormitory for eight weeks, while her paperwork was processed. Then the Stasi found her an apartment in the Treptow district—a fifth-floor walkup with a sink for a bathtub and a coal-fired stove for heat—and a job as a typist at an electronics factory. They kept their distance for the first year, as she settled in. Then, one day, a man in a gray suit came to her door and rang the bell. "He said, 'Hello, I'm from State Security,'" she recalled last September, when I visited her in Germany. "And I breathed a sigh of relief and let him in."

We were sitting in her small, sunlit apartment in Berlin's Mitte district, once the heart of East Berlin, now home to art galleries, an Apple store, and a purveyor of Swedish electric cars. Genin is ninety-one—no longer the stocky, hard-charging Stomper of her Stasi file but remarkably clear-minded for her age. She has thick gray hair, a blunt nose, and eyes that peer skeptically through oversized glasses. She speaks English with a mild accent—her bright Australian vowels cross-grained by grumbly German consonants—and tells stories with methodical precision, ticking off names and dates like items in a safe-deposit box. "There is only one way to live with my life," she said. "And that's to be open about the facts." In 2009, she published an autobiography entitled "Ich Folgte den Falschen Göttern" ("I Followed the Wrong Gods").

East Germans all seem to know a few stories like Genin's. They tell them about their neighbors and co-workers and best friend's cousins. They watch "The Lives of Others"—the 2006 film about a Stasi agent who spies on a playwright and his girlfriend—and shake their heads, saying, "They should have made it about my *Tante* Hilda." The sheer number and surreal specificity of Stasi stories are proof of the agency's insidious reach, of how deeply it infiltrated every corner of East German society. But they also show how thoroughly its secrets were later exposed. In January, 1992, the newly unified German government made almost the entire archive of Stasi reports available to the public: a hundred and eleven kilometres of files, divided into some nine thousand index headings, covering half a century of surveillance. It was the most radical release of state secrets in history: WikiLeaks on a vast scale.

The Stasi files offer an astonishingly granular picture of life in a dictatorship—how ordinary people act under suspicious eyes. Nearly three hundred thousand East Germans were working for the Stasi by the time the Wall fell, in 1989, including some two hundred thousand *inoffizielle Mitarbeiter*, or unofficial collaborators, like Genin. In a population of sixteen million, that was one spy for every fifty to sixty people. In the years since the files were made public, their revelations have derailed political campaigns, tarnished artistic legacies, and exonerated countless citizens who were wrongly accused or imprisoned. Yet some of the files that the Stasi most wanted to hide were never released. In the weeks

before the Wall fell, agents destroyed as many documents as they could. Many were pulped, shredded, or burned, and lost forever. But between forty and fifty-five million pages were just torn up, and later stuffed in paper sacks.

The Germans have spent the past thirty years piecing them back together. The work is done by hand at Stasi Central, in Berlin, the former headquarters of the State Security Service, and is often touted as a symbol of the country's unwavering commitment to transparency. Yet progress has been excruciatingly slow. Creating the files took hundreds of thousands of spies and informants, but reconstructing them has been left to only a dozen or so archival workers—jigsaw puzzlers of a sort. In the decades since the Wall fell, they've reassembled less than five per cent of the torn pages. At this pace, finishing the job will take more than six hundred years.

Last fall, the Stasi archive launched a new effort to automate the project, in the hope that the latest scanners and artificial-intelligence programs could accelerate the process. The files have never seemed more relevant. One in five Germans now supports the far-right party Alternative für Deutschland, and authoritarian parties have been on the rise across Europe. Yet the archive has always faced opposition from two sides: politicians threatened by what its files might contain, and former East Germans who say that the files offer only a narrow, twisted view of their history—one that the West has been all too eager to promote. The Stasi files are like an endless police blotter: a meticulous, bewilderingly detailed account of an entire society's deceptions and betrayals.

Stasi Central sits on the desolate outskirts of eastern Berlin. From the ground, it has the dingy, dispirited look of an abandoned factory: dozens of prefabricated concrete buildings hunkered around a courtyard, with their backs to the city. From the sky, it looks like a hedge maze. In 1950, when the Stasi first moved into a former finance office here, the German Democratic Republic had just been founded. Three years later, it was in a state of fear. During the workers' uprising, protesters nearly seized the government's headquarters, in Berlin, before the Soviet Army intervened. Afterward, when some fifteen hundred protesters had been served with lengthy prison sentences, the ruling Socialist Unity Party resolved never to be caught off guard again. It needed an early-warning system—a way to know what East Germans were thinking before those thoughts coalesced into action. The Stasi had been focussing on foreign agents and other threats from abroad. The real danger was at home.

Nothing was too trivial for the Stasi's scrutiny. One facility in Berlin was devoted solely to steaming open and reading several thousand private letters a day. Another was full of engineers devising fiendishly miniaturized surveillance devices: pinhole cameras that could hide behind a buttonhole; pea-size microphones inserted into fountain pens, table legs, or fake sugar cubes. To spy on a private residence, an agent might set up in the apartment next door, drill a hole through the wall, and slip in a flexible tube with an eyepiece on one end and a lens on the other. To take surveillance pictures at night, the agent might trigger an array of infrared flashes, concealed inside a car door, when the target walked by. So few places were safe from Stasi eyes and ears that some people are said to have saved their most sensitive conversations for Ping-Pong games in the city parks. When the Stasi found out, it was later rumored, they hung microphones from the trees.

On the evening of January 15, 1990, two months after the Wall fell, more than ten thousand protesters gathered outside the main gate of Stasi Central, carrying bricks and shouting, "If you don't let us in, we'll wall you in!" It was a long time coming. Most Stasi offices elsewhere in the country had been seized a few weeks earlier. The East German parliament had officially ended the rule of the Socialist Unity Party on the first of December, and the politburo had resigned two days later. By then, in the city of Erfurt, three hours southwest of Berlin, there were reports of smoke billowing above the local Stasi headquarters. Were the agents burning files? Within a day, activists from a group called Women for Change had rallied citizens to occupy the building; other citizens' groups across East Germany followed suit. The

"Not it!"

takeovers were swift and mostly by the book. The activists worked with local police and brought in newly deputized state prosecutors to secure the files. They wanted to be as clear and lawful as their predecessors had been treacherous.

Stasi Central was a more daunting target. The compound had as many as seven thousand employees and a record of ruthless brutality. It was a place of immense, forbidding power. "Nobody expected to be killed immediately, but it was intimidating," David Gill, the head of the citizens' committee that was formed after the complex was seized, told me. The agents at Stasi Central were soaking pages and turning them to pulp, so there was no telltale smoke above the facility. Still, Gill said, "everyone knew." When I asked him why they waited two months to save the files, he said, "That's a question that I often ask myself."

Gill and I were standing at the heart of the compound. Across the courtyard stood the hulking administrative building once ruled over by Erich Mielke, the agency's shadowy chairman. On the first night of the protests in 1990, some Stasi workers opened the gate eventually, but they diverted the crowd to a nearby cultural building. Mielke's offices weren't occupied until the following night, when Gill joined the protesters.

"It still smells and looks the same," he said, as we stepped into the lobby. When he and the others first rushed in, he recalled, he looked around at all the oak panelling and the banal middle manager's desk in Mielke's office and thought, *Was für ein Spießbürger!* What a philistine. How could this place have filled them with such fear? "But, compared with the rest of East Germany, this was luxury," he said.

Gill is now the German consul-general of New York, a seasoned diplomat with plump cheeks, impish eyes, and a calm, knowing manner. After reunification, he earned a law degree and served as chief of staff for Joachim Gauck, the President of Germany from 2012 to 2017. But in 1990 he was just a former plumber who was studying to be a Protestant minister like his father. He joined the citizens' committee by chance, after talking to a fellow-protester who took him to meet the leaders of the occupation, and was soon elected to be its president. He was one of the few committee members with any political experience. After tenth grade, he had attended a parochial school not recognized by the state, where the curriculum wasn't dictated by Marxist-Leninist principles. "I was unideologized," he told me. "We had a student parliament, so I was used to debating and giving speeches—nothing you would have learned in regular school."

After the Wall fell, a group of opposition leaders and East German politicians formed the Central Round Table, moderated by clergy, to oversee the transition to a new government. The citizens' committee, meanwhile, was put in charge of deciding what to do about the Stasi and their files. There is a photograph of Gill at a press conference not long after Stasi Central was taken. His shirt is rumpled and his sleeves rolled up; his hair nearly covers his eyes. He leans over his microphone with a look of vexed intensity, as if preparing to cut off some thickheaded questioner. Even in the giddy months of the Peaceful Revolution, as it was called, the Stasi files were a point of bitter dispute. One faction of the citizens' committee wanted to preserve them; the other wanted to destroy them. East Germans feared that the records could still be used against them. West Germans worried that the files would expose some of their own intelligence agents. Only the Stasi knew what was in the files, and they warned that the information could destroy all of East German society. "They said, 'These files are social dynamite—the whole country will blow up,'" Gill told me. " 'People will be killing their neighbors because they worked for the Stasi.'"

Those in favor of destruction were in the majority at first, Roland Jahn, an East German dissident who went on to direct the Stasi archive, told me. "Many West Germans, including Helmut Kohl, were also of the opinion that these files are poison," he said. At a minimum, the records of the foreign-intelligence service should be destroyed, the Stasi insisted. The Round Table and the citizens' committee eventually consented. But the information wasn't entirely lost. The C.I.A. later admitted that it had a microfilm of the foreign service's central index system—obtained through a K.G.B. agent, some said. The index, code-named Rosenholz, listed more than a hundred and fifty thousand Stasi operatives and other persons of interest in West Germany, and nearly sixty thousand spying operations. But the specifics behind it were gone.

"That was one of our biggest mistakes," Gill told me. "We shouldn't have followed the fearmongers." Stasi espionage in the West was often used against citizens in the East, he explained: "They wanted to inform themselves about the East German opposition via their West German supporters, and to know when people planned to escape." Still, Gill and the others drew the line at destroying the rest of the files. They knew how quickly a country could forget its past. After the Second World War, the Allies tried to "de-Nazify" the West German population, insisting that former Nazi Party members compile lengthy dossiers to prove their innocence or their contrition. But most of the evidence was buried or whitewashed: fewer than seven thousand West Germans were convicted of crimes that they had committed as Party members. Twenty years later, during the student protests of the late sixties, the West

GRIMMS' FACTUAL REPORTS
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CNTH

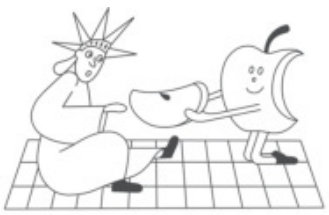
German government and military were found to be riddled with former Nazis. "I think this is deep-seated in the culture—the idea that our history teaches us something," Dagmar Hovestädt, the former head of research and outreach for the Stasi archive, told me. "We messed up twice—once horrifically. Never again should that happen."

Days before East Germany's first free elections, in March of 1990, word spread that Wolfgang Schnur, a longtime civil-rights lawyer and the leading candidate for Prime Minister, had been a Stasi informant. The news was hard for most East Germans to believe, but activists in the port city of Rostock, where Schnur practiced law, had uncovered thousands of pages of Stasi files on him. Schnur had not only worked as an informant; he had infiltrated the Protestant Church. "He was a mole," Gill said. "And that changed the discussion." When the new parliament was elected, one of its first acts was to preserve the files. From then on, every civil servant and member of government was to be screened for possible involvement with the Stasi. A year and a half later, the files were opened to the general public: anyone could now see his own Stasi file.

"We let the darkness out into the light," Hovestädt said. In addition to the hundred and eleven kilometres of files, there were more than two million photographs and slides, more than twenty thousand audio recordings, nearly three thousand videos and films, and forty-six million index cards. It was too much for one archive to hold. Materials that were intact were shelved at Stasi Central and twelve regional archives. Half the torn pages were also stored in the regional archives; the rest were tossed in the "copper kettle"—a basement room at Stasi Central which had been lined with copper, to block radio transmissions. There were sixteen thousand sacks in all—roughly five hundred million bits of paper. The question now was what to do with them.

Dieter Tietze stood in an empty office and stared at some scraps of paper on a table. He and the other puzzlers are housed in a restricted area on the third floor of the Stasi archive, behind beige doors that run down the hall in identical rows. Like most of his colleagues, Tietze prefers to work alone. "I need peace to do this well," he told me. Sometimes, he said, he concentrates so hard that he goes home with a headache at the end of the day. Yet he loves his job. It's a combination of gaming and detective work. "You have to have fun doing it," he said. "I have found many things that have made my eyes go wide."

Puzzlers are a peculiar breed. They care more about pattern than content, composition than meaning. The shapes



they arrange could be pieces of a tattered Rembrandt or a lost Gospel, but the whole matters less than the connection of its parts. Tietze is sixty-five and has been working in the archive for half his life. Short and round, with thick fingers and a bald head stubbled with gray, he moves with a stiff-jointed deliberation, never taking his eyes off the pieces. He transferred to this job three and a half years ago, for health reasons—most archival work requires too much filing and walking around—and has found that it suits him. He has a patient mind and an eye for shape and line. "The room may look chaotic, but developing a theme takes a while," he said. "You think the corner is missing, and then you see, Oh, it's there! It's an 'Aha!' experience."

The scraps on the table had been pulled from a brown paper sack the size of a large trash can. They were of varying colors, weaves, and thicknesses; some were printed on one side, others on both. Stasi agents probably tried to destroy files that were especially incriminating, but they didn't have time to be too selective; they often just cleared the pages off their desks. Some documents were shredded, but the machines jammed one by one—they weren't meant for mass destruction. Other documents were ripped into small pieces in order to be pulped, but that took too long. Eventually, the agents just tore pages in half or in quarters and threw them into whatever containers they could find, sometimes mixed with candy wrappers, apple cores, and other garbage. It was exhausting. The agents' hands cramped and fingers swelled and skin got covered in paper cuts, and, in their haste, they left an inadvertent record of their work. Each sack was like a miniature archeological site: the scraps were layered inside like potsherds. If Tietze lifted them out in careful handfuls, a few strata at a time, the adjacent pieces often fit together.

Tietze pulled two scraps off the table and laid them alongside each other. Their torn edges matched, but not the typed words along the tear. He shook his head and tried another pair. Same problem. "Sometimes you say, '*Wunderbar!* I can do this quickly,' " he said. "Other times, you work on the same pieces for ten or twelve days." Tietze spoke in a low, muttering Berlin dialect. He was born and raised in the city but considers himself neither East German nor West German. In 1961, his father stood on the border just before the Wall went up and debated which side to be on. He chose the East. When the Wall came down, nearly thirty years later, Tietze watched on TV. "I couldn't have imagined it," he told me. "The next day, I went to work but nobody was there. Everyone was in West Berlin."

In the years since, the reconstructed files have helped trace an alternate history of Germany. They span all four decades of the G.D.R., Hovestädt says, and cover everything from the Stasi's investigation of a Nazi war criminal to agents' infiltration of East and West German peace movements. They describe the persecution of prominent dissidents like Robert Havemann and Stefan Heym, and doping practices among East German athletes. They report on the activities of the West German terrorist Silke Maier-Witt, a member of the Baader-Meinhof gang who went into hiding in East Germany, and on an informant known as Schäfer, who infiltrated dissident groups in the G.D.R. The extent of Stasi spying came as a shock to Tietze at first, though he had lived in its midst most of his life. Yet he radiates no sense of impassioned purpose. He just comes to the office day after day, like the Stasi before him, and methodically reassembles what they destroyed.

As we talked, Tietze laid the matching

halves of a page on a plastic mat cross-hatched with graph lines. The page was from the Stasi division in charge of surveillance devices. Tietze is careful not to divulge information from the reconstructed pages to anyone, not even his family. A document might mention someone whom the Stasi spied on, and he has no right to that information. "These files are contaminated," Dagmar Hovestädt told me. "They were compiled with constant violations of human rights. Nobody ever gave consent." When the files were opened to the public, careful limits were put on how they could be accessed. People can request to see what the Stasi wrote about them, but not about anyone else. Every name in the file has to be redacted, save for the reader's own and those of Stasi agents. The only exceptions are public figures, people who have consented to have their files released, and those who have been dead for more than thirty years. "The moral point is this: the Stasi don't get to decide what we read," Hovestädt said. "We decide."

Tietze joined the torn halves with a thin strip of clear archival tape—the word *Mittag* came together along the tear—then flipped the page over and taped the other side. Working steadily like this for a year, he could piece together two or three thousand pages. All told, the puzzlers at the archive have reconstructed more than 1.7 million pages—both an astonishing feat and an undeniable failure. More than fifteen thousand sacks of torn files remain. In 1995, when the project was launched, it had a team of about fifty puzzlers. By 2006, the number had dwindled to a handful, as members retired or were reassigned to other agencies. It was clear, by then, that reconstructing files by hand was a fool's errand. What was needed was a puzzling machine.

Bertram Nickolay, a Berlin-based engineer and expert in machine vision, remembers hearing about the puzzlers when the project began. He thought of his friend Jürgen Fuchs, an East German writer and dissident. Fuchs was arrested for "anti-state agitation" in 1976 and imprisoned for nine months at the infamous Hohenschönhausen compound, in Berlin. He had been trained as a social psychologist, and later wrote a detailed account of the Stasi methods in his book "Vernehmungsprotokolle" ("Interrogation Records"). Political prisoners like Fuchs were strip-searched, isolated, and kept awake for days at a time. Some were locked in rubber cells, outdoor cages, or basement lockers so damp that their skin began to rot. The end goal for Stasi interrogators, Fuchs wrote, was the "disintegration of the soul."

When Fuchs was finally released, in 1977, after international protests, he was deported to West Berlin, where Nickolay first met him. But the threats on Fuchs's life continued. In 1986, a bomb exploded by his front door as he was about to walk his daughter to school. (They were both unscathed but could have been killed if the timing were different.) When Fuchs died, in 1999, of a rare blood cancer, some East Germans suspected that the Stasi had deliberately exposed him to radiation while he was in prison. Two other dissidents from the same era, Rudolph Bahro and Gerulf Pannach, had also been imprisoned by the Stasi and died of rare cancers. Nickolay wondered if the Stasi archive had records of the plot against Fuchs. Could they be among the documents that were torn apart before the Wall fell?

"There were reports on television about a small team manually reconstructing the files," Nickolay told me. "So I thought, This is a very interesting field for machine vision." At the time, Nickolay was a lead engineer at a member institute of the Fraunhofer-Gesellschaft, the German technology giant that helped invent the MP3. With the right scanner and software, he reckoned, a computer could identify the fragments of a page and piece them together digitally. The human puzzlers at the archive could work only with documents torn into fewer than eight parts. They lifted out the biggest scraps and left the small ones behind—often more than half the contents of a sack. A computer could do better, Nickolay believed. It could reconstruct pages from even the smallest fragments, and search for images of missing pieces from other sacks. You just had to scan the fragments and save the images in a database.

The reality proved more frustrating. It took five years for the Stasi archive just to respond to Nickolay's proposal. By 2003, the Fraunhofer team had performed a feasibility study and created a prototype program, later dubbed the e-Puzzler, that could reconstruct pages torn into as many as ten pieces. But it was another three years before the project was funded—a delay that Nickolay blames on a change in government. Then

MARIGOLD

I have the sun's eye one minute—
the next, I'm going to bed with it.
Last night, I dreamed of rosemary,
for remembrance and for a baby

born to a woman who lived
in an apartment building. In the dream,
the dead and I said goodbye
at the door. I tried to buy a magazine

in a drugstore, but nothing was easy.
Nothing is easy when you're shopping
for the dead. Maybe toys, I thought,
as I passed some boys playing

by the side of a road. Maybe a gold key
with which to open a coffin lid.
I woke to find none of the bodies inside
were alive outside the dream.

—Mary Jo Bang

the team's industrial partner, a subsidiary of Lufthansa, which had been tasked with designing the scanner for the project, dropped out. Scanning was supposed to be the easy part—even some home offices had high-resolution scanners by then. But the pieces had to be scanned on both sides simultaneously, with extreme precision. For images to fit together, their color and texture had to match perfectly, their edges align to within a pixel's width. "Normal scanners can't do that," Nickolay said. "And, when we looked around, we realized that no scanner in the world could."

The Fraunhofer team eventually found a scanner that could be retrofitted to do the job. But it couldn't handle large batches of material. By 2014, the team had reassembled only twenty-three sacks of documents. It was an impressive achievement in its way—the e-Puzzler could now reconstruct pages torn into more than a hundred pieces—but the team had expected to reconstruct four hundred sacks. After the project came to a halt, in 2014, Fraunhofer declared it "successfully completed." Others disagree. As a Stasi archivist put it, "Fifteen thousand bags, twenty-three reconstructed—you can't call that a success."

One afternoon, not long after I visited the Stasi archive, I went to see the successor to the e-Puzzler. Nickolay retired from Fraunhofer in 2022. He now works with a company called MusterFabrik Berlin, which is housed in an old piano factory in the Mitte district. He turned seventy-one this year but seems to have lost little of his drive. His pale features flushed pink as he led me past rows of computer workstations, and stray strands of his white hair dropped across his forehead. In the past five years, he said, MusterFabrik has used its scanner and a newly designed puzzler program to help reconstruct fragments of a Roman mural, documents from a Jewish community center in Buenos Aires which was destroyed by a bomb in 1994, and the papers of the polymath Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz. But its most ambitious project, the one likeliest to serve as a model for reconstructing the Stasi files, is in Cologne.

Fifteen years ago, the city's municipal archive suddenly, catastrophically, collapsed, after excavations for a new subway undermined it. Ninety per cent of the building's archival contents were buried beneath the rubble, including medieval manuscripts more than a thousand years old. The remains were covered in dirt and soaked and misshapen by groundwater. Unlike the Stasi documents, they hadn't been ripped in half or into quarters and dropped into sacks one layer at a time. They were strewn, willy-nilly, among the building's remains. The site wasn't an archeological dig. It was an enormous pit with soggy puzzle pieces thrown into it.

More than three million fragments were eventually sifted from the rubble. A new archive was built, and for the past three years the city has been reconstructing the remains with MusterFabrik's help. The fragments are scanned and saved on a server in the archive's computer center, where the puzzling software leafs through them continuously, looking for matches. Jan Schneider, MusterFabrik's head of project development, pulled up a sample of the Cologne database on his laptop and projected it on an oversized screen. It showed a constellation of more than a hundred thousand fragments, clustered like grains of sand in a Tibetan mandala. He sorted the fragments by size and color, then zoomed in on a few pieces. They were from a three-hundred-year-old manuscript, handwritten in Latin—you could see bits of flowing script on the pieces. It can take years for all the pieces of a page to be scanned, Schneider explained, since the remains are so scattered. But when the last piece is found the program combines it with the rest and sends the completed page to the archivists for review. He hit a key on his laptop. As we watched, a few scraps drifted loose from the mass of fragments onscreen and came together in a neat rectangle.

With a single scanner and a team of eight workers, the archive in Cologne has pieced together tens of thousands of fragments in the past two and a half years. Yet the scanner and software were never really the problem at the Stasi archive. The original e-Puzzler was already better than people at reconstructing files. It just wasn't much faster. The fragments still had to be lifted from a sack, picked apart, unfolded, and flattened on the glass to be properly scanned. If the average worker needs five minutes to place and scan fifty fragments, scanning every scrap in the Stasi archive will take close to a million hours.

New technology could eventually speed up the process. Last year, students from universities in Germany, Switzerland, and the United States deciphered part of an ancient Roman scroll from a villa in Herculaneum. It had been burned by the heat from Mt. Vesuvius—the same blast that destroyed Pompeii. Using a CT scanner and an artificial-intelligence program, the students virtually unwrapped the scroll and traced the remnants of ink in the papyrus. A similar method could theoretically be used to digitally unfold the Stasi fragments. But for now the work still has to be done manually. No mechanical press or roller, no clever prosthesis can do it with the necessary accuracy. "We need a robot hand that doesn't exist," Schneider said.

As long as there are torn files left in sacks, Hovestädt says, the Stasi archive will piece them back together. In September, the archive put out a call for proposals to relaunch the digital reconstruction project. MusterFabrik was among the companies that were subsequently invited to present a proposal in person. The winner has yet to be chosen. Nickolay once believed that the fifteen thousand sacks could be reassembled in ten or twenty years, given the proper funding and personnel. He now doubts that the government has the stomach for it. "I think they never really wanted this project," he told me. "We will let ourselves be surprised."

It has been thirty-five years since the Wall fell. Are the files still worth reconstructing? Most of the leaders from that era have died, and the time of shocking revelations may be over. Screening the files of public servants was an act of "political hygiene," David Gill told me, and opening the archive to the public brought justice for millions of East Germans. But how much can a country learn from its darkest history alone?

The last time I saw Salomea Genin, she brought out three bulging ring binders and plopped them onto a coffee table in front of me. She was just a minor operative, she said—the smallest of cogs in the Stasi machine—yet her handlers had written more than five hundred pages about her. "Only about fifty pages are of interest," she said, waving a hand at the

binders. Yet the edges of many pages were feathered with yellow place markers, the margins filled with her spidery script. Here and there, the paragraphs were flecked with redactions, but Genin didn't mind. She remembered most of the people she had spied on, so she just scribbled their names above the black marks.

After her Stasi handler's first visit in East Berlin, in 1964, the two of them met in her apartment every two weeks. "It wasn't a question of talking about anything suspicious," she said. "He just wanted to know everything about everyone." At first, Genin told him about her friends and neighbors and co-workers at the electronics factory. Then her assignments grew more involved. She took a job as a reporter at the state radio station and informed on the journalists there. She later became an interpreter and a tour guide for the Ministry of Culture, where she was often assigned to visiting foreign dignitaries. Genin never married, but she had two sons after moving to East Germany, and her handler would sometimes talk to them when they came home from school. "I just told them that he was from State Security," she said. "He was a pleasant man."

As Genin's standing with the Stasi improved, so did her life style. In 1966, she left her cold-water flat in Treptow for her first apartment in Mitte. "It was the latest of the late," she told me. "It had a shower, built-in cupboards, and central heating." She got a new Trabant after only five years on the waiting list—most people waited for a decade or more—and often travelled abroad. At first, she attributed these perks to her Jewish ancestry: as a *Verfolgte des Nazi Regimes*—a former target of the Nazi regime—she was at the front of the line for housing, early retirement, and other privileges. But she later learned that working for the Stasi had probably improved her status. "They gave it to me because I had been an informant," she said. "I'm sure that I had half a dozen guardian angels looking after me."

What Genin doesn't say, and might not know, is how much harm was done by her duplicity. How many lives were destroyed by her seemingly innocuous words to her handler? The Stasi acted in the shadows, undermining lives from within. They blocked promotions and cut off academic studies. They ransacked apartments, planted pornography, and kept scraps of clothing for search dogs to sniff. They threatened families, questioned neighbors, and refused travel visas to people with dying loved ones abroad. If you were deemed especially suspect, you could be interrogated, deported, or imprisoned for months without trial.

More than once, Genin told me, she came close to seeing the Stasi for what they were. In 1964, she recalled, she was denounced at a Party meeting for speaking critically of the government. Afterward, she was demoted from reporter to translator at the radio station and forced to read out a public confession. "I just stood there and vomited in myself," she told me. In 1976, when she was studying philosophy at Humboldt University, she almost failed a class for noting that some East German workers seemed just as alienated as their capitalist counterparts. Yet she returned to the fold again and again.

"You have to understand, this was my family," she told me. "I had lived for this wonderful cause all my life, from the age of twelve. The Party was my Mummy and the Stasi were my Daddy." I asked if she ever saw the Stasi apprehend someone based on the information she'd given. She shook her head. "If I'd seen that, I would have woken up to myself," she said. "But I didn't. I was simply an informant, and they wrote down what I told them."

As a Stasi informant, Genin learned to blind herself to the reality around her. But even ordinary East Germans had to do the same. From the moment they started school, their actions were freighted with political consequence. Kindergartners sang Marxist-Leninist anthems. Teen-agers signed petitions denouncing the Prague Spring. Adults voted in every election, though only Socialist Unity Party candidates were on the ballot. Everyone marched in parades and hung flags from their porches, even if their friends or relatives were in a Stasi prison.

"Nobody was just a rebel or conformist," Roland Jahn, the former dissident, wrote in his 2014 book, "Wir Angepassten" ("We Who Adapted"). Living in the G.D.R. was an unending *Eiertanz*—like dancing on a floor covered with eggs. The cost of dissent was so great, the fear so deep and unconscious, that people learned to unsee the Wall itself. "I can't remember ever having a serious, detailed conversation about it," Jahn wrote. "Not about the Wall, or the order to fire at those who tried to cross it, or those who died doing so. Not in the family, not among friends. Only occasionally, when the Wall appeared on West German television, would we turn to one another and shake our heads. Wasn't it terrible that this existed? As if all of this was happening to other people and we weren't held captive by the Wall ourselves."

The new Germany would have blind spots of its own: panhandlers camped outside Mercedes showrooms, drug users passed out on subway platforms. On the eve of reunification, Helmut Kohl promised East Germans an economic future of *blühende Landschaften*—blossoming landscapes. But the West didn't merge with the East so much as colonize it, dismantling its industries and cultural institutions, and drawing away many of its best young workers. In areas that were hardest hit, like Saxony-Anhalt, a sense of *Ostalgie* has taken hold—a nostalgia for the East. The economy was more equitable under the G.D.R., some say, communities more tightly woven, women more empowered. (Ninety per cent of women were employed in East Germany, versus only sixty per cent in West Germany.) Like the MAGA movement in the U.S., far-right groups like Alternative für Deutschland have recently flipped the script of liberal triumphalism. When lockdowns and mandatory COVID testing were imposed during the pandemic, they said it was like living under the Stasi.

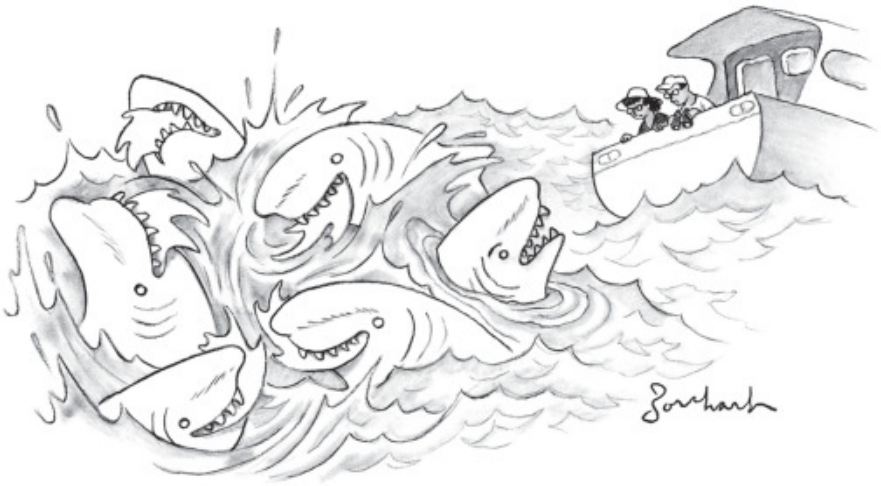
The Stasi files offer a startling corrective to such accounts—like cataract surgery on a societal scale. "That's why this archive is so important," Elmar Kramer, a spokesperson at the archive, told me. "There was no freedom of the press in the G.D.R., no freedom of speech. There was a shoot-at-will order at the Wall. You can see it right there." Yet the files, in their way, give an equally distorted view of German life. Once they were released, every moment was seen through the lens of a surveillance camera, every decision

through a prism of complicity and betrayal. If government support for reconstructing the files has flagged, it may be because the story they tell is too black-and-white. With one stroke, the files divided East Germany in two—into victims and collaborators, when almost everyone had been a little of both.

"Stasi, Stasi, Stasi, always about the Stasi," the historian Rainer Eckert, a former East German dissident and the author of the 2023 book "Umkämpfte Vergangenheit" ("Embattled Past"), told me. "About thirty million lived in East Germany at one time or another, and only a fraction worked with the Stasi. People say, 'Where is *my* life in all this?'" Eckert was arrested and interrogated by the Stasi, accused of espionage, and fired from jobs and academic positions. Roland Jahn was expelled from university, sentenced to twenty-two months in prison (of which he served six), and then deported to West Germany. Yet neither man feels as if the dictatorship defined his life. "There were rules, yes, and there was the deadly Wall, but there was also freedom," Jahn wrote in his autobiography. "And if you concentrated on that—on the small successes in everyday life—then life in the G.D.R. was bearable. How else could you come to terms with your self-image? How else could you live?"

No archive can truly capture a nation's lived experience, no matter how many documents it contains. The Stasi files are like a history of the United States told through the annals of the F.B.I. and the C.I.A.: a succession of wiretaps, interrogations, political coups, and misinformation—an America as real as it is unrecognizable. And yet that dark, disorienting perspective is what makes the files essential. They're the version of our history that we can't admit to ourselves.

After the Arab Spring, in 2011, delegations from Tunisia and Egypt visited the Stasi archive, hoping to learn how they might contend with their own authoritarian pasts. But few countries have followed Germany's example. Revolutionaries tend to keep a government's secrets even after they've overthrown it. When the Soviet Union broke apart, in 1991, activists called for the release of the K.G.B. archives, but the Yeltsin government demurred. Seven years later, when Vladimir Putin became Prime Minister, there were few public records that could expose his role in Soviet repression, no surveillance transcripts or torture records to temper nostalgia for the Communist era. It came as no surprise, when the Russian Army invaded Ukraine two years ago, that archives were among its primary targets. More than five hundred libraries have been damaged or demolished, and military police have seized or destroyed K.G.B. records, Ukrainian archives, and books on Ukrainian resistance and independence movements. If you want to erase a country, start by erasing its memory.



"Frenzy? Or simply enthusiasm for a memorable dining experience?"

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More than three million people have seen their Stasi files since the archive opened, in 1992, and some thirty thousand new requests were submitted last year. "If you tell the employment bureau, 'I lost my pension because the Stasi wouldn't let me work like I wanted to'—well, anyone can say that," Elmar Kramer told me. "But if you can find a document in the archive that says 'So-and-So must be fired,' that's proof. It's in black-and-white with a stamp on it."

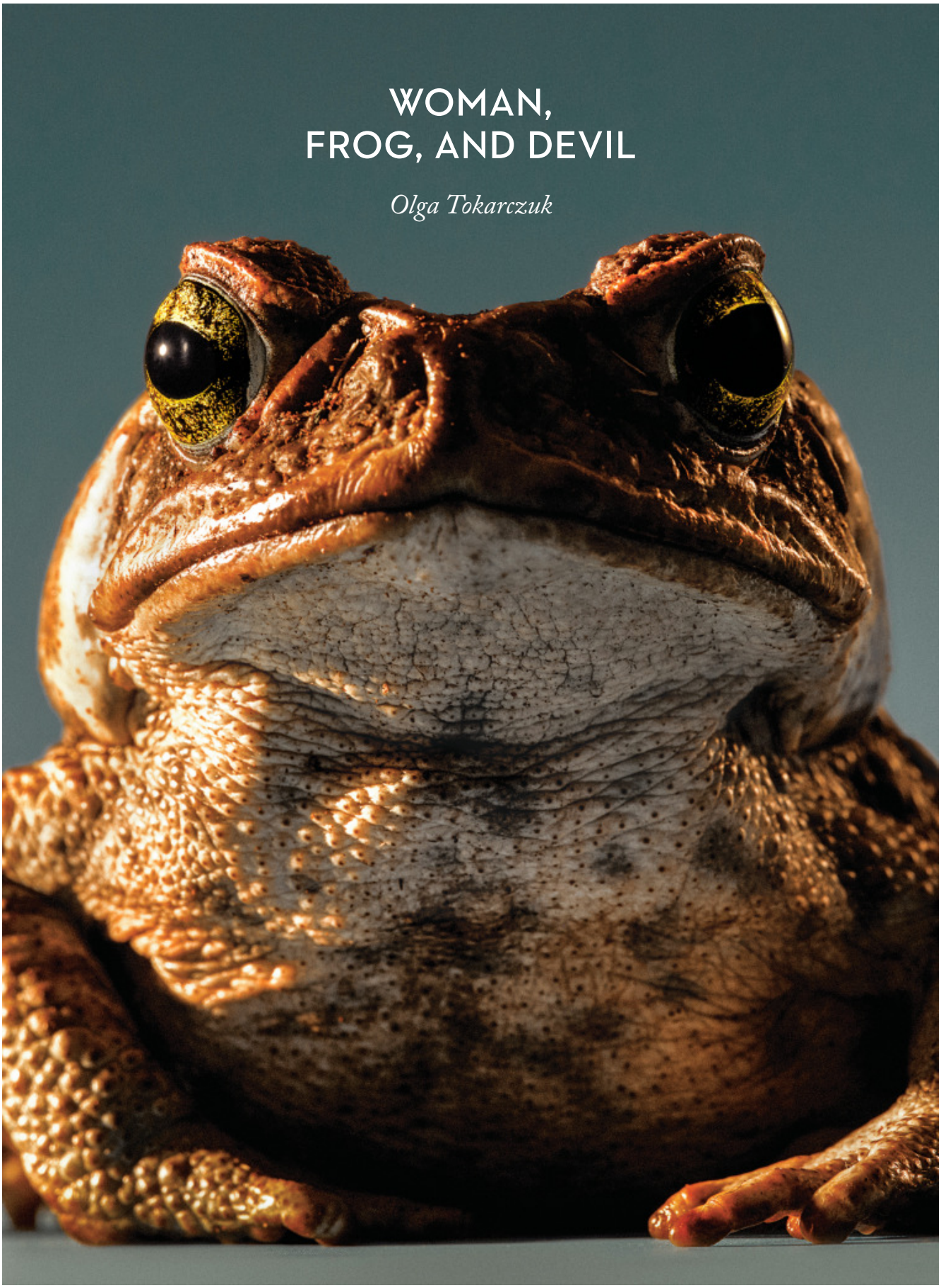
Those stories, more than any tale of double agents or government duplicity, are the heart of the Stasi files. They're a reminder that "perfectly normal, decent people are capable of this," as Dagmar Hovestädt put it. "By pretending that they're evil, we forgo the lesson. We forget how close we are to being captured in the same situation." The Stasi operated the largest intelligence network in the world, per capita, yet the people they spied on still outnumbered them more than fifty to one. Had East Germans rebelled en masse, nothing could have saved the system. "Dictatorships need the middle to function, and the vast majority of people are in the middle," Hovestädt said. "They don't stick up their heads."

Salomea Genin did admit to her own complicity eventually, but her awakening was slow to come. She was waiting to watch the West German news on television one night, in the fall of 1982, when an ad came on for a documentary series on the rise of Hitler. Genin had always wondered how so many Germans could claim that they didn't know what the Nazis were doing to their Jewish neighbors. How could they have been so schizophrenic? Now it struck her that she was no different. "My whole life, I had thought about this sentence of George Santayana's, that those who forget history are doomed to repeat it," she told me. "And suddenly I realized that it applied to me, too. That this socialism was not what it claimed to be. That it was, in fact, a police state—and, what's more, I had helped to make it so."

She fell into a "deep, dark hole" after that, she said. "I didn't want to live." Yet it was another seven years before she resigned from the Socialist Unity Party. By then, her sons had left East Germany to live in West Berlin, but Genin stayed where she was. "All my life, I'd been looking for a place to call my home," she said. "And I finally had it." Six months later, that country was gone. ♦

WOMAN, FROG, AND DEVIL

Olga Tokarczuk



PHOTOGRAPH BY SUZANNE SAROFF

January Wojnicz, a retired civil servant and a landowner, was a splendid man, as they said in Lwów, handsome and dignified. As a man of fifty-plus, he had dark hair with hardly any gray and thick stubble; he shaved with great tenacity, leaving only his magnificent mustache, which he cared for and curled with the use of a pomade, the base ingredient of which was tallow. As a result, his son, Mieczysław, forever associated the smell of rancid fat with his father; it was his second, aromatic skin.

January could easily have made a good second marriage, but he had lost all interest in women, as though his wife, who had died several months after giving birth, enfeebled by the effort of producing a child and by some sort of inexplicable depression, had permanently destroyed his trust in the fairer sex—as if he felt cheated by this, or even disgraced. She had given birth and promptly died! What nerve! His mother had passed away prematurely, too. There was something wrong with these mothers; they seemed to do a terribly dangerous job, risking their lives tangled in lace in their boudoirs and bedrooms, leading a lethal existence among the bedclothes and the copper pans, among the towels, powders, and stacks of menus for every day of the year. In Mieczysław Wojnicz's family world, the women had vague, short, perilous lives, and then they died, remaining in people's memories as fleeting shapes without contours. They were reduced to a remote, unclear impulse placed in the universe temporarily, for the sole purpose of its biological consequences.

Later, Mieczysław's nanny would exist in his memory as a blurred figure, always veiled by something, out of focus, on the run, a long, thin streak. But as a child he played with her, with her hands and the wrinkled skin on them. He would grip that skin between his thumb and forefinger, pretending to be a gander (they called it "tweaking"), and in doing so he would smooth out her hands until they became almost young. He used to fantasize that if he could figure out how to smooth out all of Gliceria (this bizarre name was very popular in those days among the peasants in the Lwów region), to tighten up her outer form, maybe he would succeed in saving his nanny from old age. But he couldn't.

His father believed that the blame for both national disasters and educational failures lay with a soft upbringing that encouraged girlishness, mawkishness, and passivity, nowadays fashionably termed "individualism." He did not approve. What counted were manliness, energy, social work for the public good, rationalism, pragmatism. He was especially fond of the word "pragmatism."

In the name of Mieczysław's education and appropriately masculine upbringing, January decided to sell some of the land and property that his wife had left him and to buy a bright, comfortable apartment in Lwów. He took Gliceria with them, to serve as cook, maid, and nanny. From then on, as befitted a respectable, if incomplete, family, they became citizens of Lwów.

It was a good decision. By investing his money in modernity, January had behaved very pragmatically, and in fact he gained many advantages from living in the city. His new business interests picked up; it was easier to take care of them on the spot than it had been from sluggish, provincial Galicia, from which every trip to the city was like a voyage across the ocean.

January Wojnicz was an enterprising, courageous man. He put some of the money from the property he had sold into a small apartment house and a brickyard in a village near Brzeżany, and he placed the rest in shares in the Galician railway; all together this provided him with a tidy income, easily enough to support himself and his son in perfectly decent style. He was sensible and cautious, bordering on stingy. On the rare occasions when he bought an object, it was always of the best quality.

Naturally, attempts were made to marry him off for a second time, but in January Wojnicz's mind his late wife had become such a unique, perfect creature that no woman on earth could be more than a poor shadow of her, a figure unworthy of attention, or even annoying, as if she were clumsily trying to imitate that wondrous being.

As a result, the only woman Mieczysław Wojnicz remembered having seen up close and in detail was Gliceria. She mothered him a bit in the kitchen, supplying him with tasty morsels, but, as her authority did not extend beyond the thresholds of the other rooms, it was only there that little Mieczyś (as he was known to his father and his uncle in those days) was pampered. She tried to compensate him for the loss of his mother by pouring a little buckwheat honey onto his plate, or by cutting the crunchy heel off a loaf of bread and thickly spreading it with fresh butter. Food always had good associations for him.

He received these manifestations of warm feeling with a gratitude that might have had a chance of developing into affection and love, but his father would not allow that. January treated Gliceria as nothing more than a servant, never with familiarity, and was full of mistrust toward this plump, elderly woman, hidden among skirts, flounces, and bonnets. He despised her corpulence and, suspecting her of stealing food, paid her less than he should have.

There was always something uneasy about Mieczyś's childhood baths. His father would take a long time to test him on his prayers before reluctantly handing him over to Gliceria. He would lead the child to her kingdom, the kitchen, where a tin tub full of steaming hot water would already be waiting on the floor. Mieczyś could not remember his father ever being present for bath time. The scent of soap and clean towels was a festive smell, the fragrance of Saturdays. Gliceria would receive him in her plump hands, with her sleeves rolled up to the elbows, ruddy from the heat and smiling, and from that point on little Mieczyś became a participant in the ritual of undressing, being immersed in the water, and being scrubbed with a washcloth moistened with the scented soap that Gliceria kept specially for his delicate skin, for his use only.

Throughout the bath, she twittered away to him in Polish and Ukrainian as nobody else ever did. He was her "little pearl," her "baby soap bubble," her "buttercup," her "little gem," and her "wee angel." The profusion of names intoxicated the young Mieczyś, who could not absorb all the images magically revealed by these words: jewels, churches, forests, gardens—an

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entire world was contained in them, and other worlds, too, that he did not know from his own experience but the shape of which he could imagine. The parts of his body were his "handies," his "tootsies," his "leglets," his "wee chest"; addressed this way, he felt pleased with himself and somehow even proud of his existence, a feeling he never had when communing with his father. As he gazed at his protruding stomach, it was a "tummy," and the hole in it was his "belly button." Gliceria would coo over him with sweat pouring from her brow, the entire kitchen now a steam bath.

Then she would pull Mieczyś out and onto the table, where a towel was spread, and rub the boy dry, tickling him under the arms or pretending she wanted to bite off his "wee toes." Mieczyś remembered not to laugh too loudly, for fear of alarming his father, who would probably race in, trailing the cold from the corridor and halting this delicious game, so he just giggled quietly.

His freshly laundered flannel pajamas were stiff and unpleasant, but Mieczyś knew that the next morning, after the first night, they would be the same as ever—nice and soft. The passage of time smoothed out the creases and roughness, making the world a friendlier place. Once he was sitting in his pajamas, Gliceria would fetch a comb and run it through his fair hair, cut in a pageboy, and could never resist trying to braid it into little plaits.

"It's so strong, so thick," she would say.

It was wonderful to find that the repertoire of valuable things he had at his disposal included his hair. Of course, she quickly unplaited it, but she would comb it in curls on his brow, which his father instantly ruffled when he came to say good night, as Mieczyś lay in his cold room in newly starched sheets, with a bed warmer at his feet, reflecting on those weekly bath-time endearments.

His father had often repeated to him, though Mieczysław did not actually remember when and in what situations he had heard him say it—"repeated" meant that he expressed it somehow, sometimes without even opening his mouth—that women were, by nature, treacherous and fickle. Weepy. It was impossible to know what to grab on to, what to trust in them. They were elusive, as slippery as snakes or silk (a peculiar juxtaposition, indeed). It was hard to catch hold of them; they slithered out of your hand and then laughed at your ineptitude. There was an old saying that Uncle Emil, January's younger brother and a cavalry officer in the Austrian Army, frequently quoted, and this Mieczysław remembered well. It had to do with Gliceria, or maybe with a fiancée of his uncle's, the only one, who had walked out on him and married someone else. On these occasions, his uncle—who normally had such impeccable manners—would remove the spoon from his soup and brandish it above his plate.

"Woman, frog, and devil, these are siblings treble."

The little Wojnicz did his best to fathom the meaning of this adage, but he had no idea what exactly his uniformed uncle, who usually expressed himself precisely, was trying to say. Was there really a connection between a woman, a frog, and a devil? This damp, murky threesome removed the woman from wallpapered, tidy bourgeois bedrooms and dragged her into the woods and the marshy zones of peat bogs; apparently the trio were relatives from the same abyss in the depths of the forest, where no human voice or eye could reach, and where every traveller lost his way. Oh, well, there were no such forests in the vicinity of Lwów, maybe only somewhere in Volhynia, or on the slopes of the Carpathian Mountains. He found it easier to imagine what Gliceria might have in common with a frog than with a devil, though he had never seen a devil, and to tell the truth he did not believe in them. "Folktales," his father would say. As for the frog, then yes, indeed: she was fat and shapeless, and her apron-topped skirts deformed her figure even more. If she were to squat down on the kitchen floor and raise her head the right way—yes, she would look like a frog.

Gliceria grew older. It became harder and harder for her to carry out her duties—to launder, cook, iron, and clean—and she left when Mieczyś was seven years old, having seen him through to school age. By then, his father had decided that she was no longer needed in any case; a boarding school would replace her. Once he had established all the terms with the headmaster, Mr. Szuman, he handed the boy over to him. Unfortunately, Mieczyś did not stay at this institution for long, for reasons that with friends his father referred to as "sensitivity" and "an inabil-

ity to conform," which for the boy meant total humiliation and for the father a desperate attempt to make sense of the whole disappointing situation.

Proving the old saying "There is no evil that does not bring good," Mieczyś was, from then on, taught at home by a full-time tutor, first one, then a second, and a third, which cost his father a lot of money and anxiety, because teachers were the most chimeric species in existence—nothing pleased them, and they were always finding something to complain about.

Gliceria was succeeded by Józef. He usually made pierogi, and fried fish bought at the market. Sometimes he sent Mieczyś to the cellar for potatoes and sauerkraut. This was one of the "Indian brave" tasks his father had devised, for which the little Wojnicz received badges. Going down into the cellar meant having to conquer a sudden attack of fear and disgust that made his fingers tremble as they lit the candles. The cellar was L-shaped, leading first to the left, then to the right. The potatoes lay in the darkest, dampest corner, fenced off behind some boards, in a heap that dwindled by the day and in spring sprouted white shoots, desperately seeking the light. Beside them stood barrels full of cabbage and gherkins.

Once, he saw a large toad in there, sitting motionless on top of the potatoes, staring at him with its bulging yellow eyes. He screamed and raced upstairs, but, despite his pleading and tears, his father told him to go back down. Luckily the toad was not there anymore. Afterward, every time he went into the cellar, he inevitably had it in mind; whenever he thought about it, it was there, and would remain there forever. The idea of killing it, as he at first imagined, by taking a large stone down with him from the sunlit world and throwing it at the soft, warty body, gave him a strange thrill that made his pulse run faster. But he was afraid that the consequences of this murder would be even more terrible. Crushed by a stone, the toad would contaminate the potatoes, and he would never be able to forget about it. From then on, whenever he put his hands into the barrel of gherkins, he was afraid that by some miracle it had got in there, and that he would accidentally take hold of it as it lurked among the pickles, as if it had the power to change into anything damp and slimy. Yes, it was a great school of courage—he earned those badges the hard way.

On Sundays, father and son went out to a restaurant on Trybunalska Street, where they had a ritual lunch consisting of soup, a main course, and dessert—and, for the father, an alcoholic drink and coffee—to convince themselves that one could get by without women and incompetent cooks.

Their apartment on Pańska Street in Lwów was cozy and sunny. The drawing-room and dining-room windows overlooked the street, quite a noisy one, because the cobblestones paving it changed every movement into a rumble, a drumroll. But, after a few years, their brains grew so accustomed to the noise that January thought of their abode as quiet.

When Mieczyś reached the age of thirteen, he was enrolled at a German-language gymnasium on Governor's Ramparts. Twice a day, he walked the route from home to school and back, passing the Bernardine monastery and then looking at the shop displays on Cłowa Street and Czarnecki Street. Then he went past the fire station, feeling decidedly greater respect for this institution than for the monastery. Several times he was witness to the firemen mustering to sally forth, whether as an exercise or to attend to a real fire,

and the coördination of these agile men in uniform always delighted him. The terse commands, shouts, and gestures reminded him of dances he had seen in the countryside, with foot stamping and bizarre figures performed by human bodies. The firemen danced for a purpose—to respond to a blaze, to prevent destruction or even death. Their well-practiced movements were measured to perfection, faultlessly effective. Whatever move one of them started, others finished. They passed one another hoses and buckets, they reported, leaped up and down, one-two-three, and the fire engine was ready for the road, ready to fight the element, and they sat motionless on their seats like lead soldiers. Then one of them started the siren, which drew the whole world into the orbit of their service. Little Mieczyś was so awed that goosebumps appeared on his skin. In just two minutes, the fire engine was prepared for battle—wrapped in hoses, equipped with pickaxes, crowbars, and hatchets, and encrusted with shining brass helmets—and it moved through the open gate into the city.

He walked on through the shady old trees in the park on the Ramparts and reached the school, which towered over the city, elevated, like the Dormition Church with its three cupolas standing opposite. In this church—he sometimes looked in there—was a painted angel that made him especially joyful. He called it the Four-Fingered Angel, ignoring the name Gabriel, which was written next to it, because the way the artist had depicted its hand, extended in a gesture of blessing, made it look as if it were missing a thumb, and the ring finger was slightly too short as well. Little Mieczyś felt a sort of strange relief as he gazed at this imperfection in perfection. Thanks to this minor flaw, the angel seemed closer to him, not to say human. Captured in motion, standing firmly on the ground in a green, shimmering robe (yes, there were spots of light on it), with one wing visible—not made of feathers, like a goose's wing, but as if woven from hundreds of tiny beads, and lined in red—it held a reed and looked busy, somehow preoccupied. Angels were described as "he," but it seemed obvious that the Four-Fingered Angel was exempt from these brutal divisions and had its own separate place, its own angel's sex, its own divine gender.

At the gymnasium, Mieczyś was taught German by Mścisław Baum, a large, good-looking Jew with the physique of a Viking, and although in the lessons the students constantly did their best to pronounce the words carefully, to speak the German of Goethe, something

always pulled them toward Galicia and its singsong, slanting, Polonized and Yiddisher version of the language, in which the words seemed slightly flattened, like old slippers—one could feel safe and at home in it.

Mieczyś's class could be divided into four groups: Poles, Jews, Ukrainians, and a mixed crowd including several Austrians, one Romanian, two Hungarians, and three Transylvanian Germans. Mieczyś instinctively kept to the sidelines, as if he did not belong to any of these groups, and ethnicity was not enough for him to define his place in the jigsaw puzzles they were always making, changing the vectors of strength, dependence, and advantage. The other children seemed to him too noisy, and he was afraid he might get into conflicts. He could not bear violence, all that rivalry, all the scrimmages and punches. He was friendly—perhaps that was too big a word—with a boy named Anatol, or Tolek for short, whose father, an assimilated Jew, was a well-known dentist. The boy clearly had artistic talents and a certain delicacy of manner that appealed to Mieczysław. Sometimes he let Tolek rummage in his wooden pencil case. Tolek would carefully arrange the pencils with his long fingers, touching the graphite points with a fingertip, and Mieczyś would feel a shiver of pleasure, from the skin on his head down to his shoulders and back. Together they were a couple of outsiders.

His father hoped that learning to play chess would organize Mieczyś's foggy, unruly mind. After all, chess was played at court, and the emperor himself had shown great fondness for it. This was the entertainment of wellborn men, requiring both intelligence and an ability to see ahead. The elder Wojnicz believed that moving around the chessboard in keeping with the rules would introduce an element of automatism into his son's life that would make the world safe for him, if not welcoming. So every day after lunch, just as their bodies were digesting and a gentle afternoon somnolence was suffusing them, they sat down at the table and set out the chessboard, and his father would let Mieczysław make the first move. Whenever the boy made a mistake, his father came over to his side, stood behind him, and tried to steer the child's attention through a cause-and-effect chain of potential next moves. Whenever Mieczyś was resistant, or "dull," his father let himself be carried away by anger and left the room to smoke a cigar, while his son had to sit over the chessboard until he had thought up a sensible defense or attack.

Little Mieczysław Wojnicz understood the rules and could foresee a lot, but, to tell the truth, the game did not interest him. Making moves according to the rules and aiming to defeat your opponent seemed to him just one of the possible ways to use the pawns. He preferred to daydream, and to see the chessboard as a space where the fates of the unfortunate pawns and other pieces were played out; he cast them as characters, linked by all sorts of relationships, weaving complex webs of intrigue, either with or against one another. He thought it a waste to limit their activity to the checkered board, to leave them at the mercy of a formal game played according to strict rules. So, as soon as his father lost interest and went off to see to more important matters, Mieczyś would move the chess pieces onto the steppes of the rug and the mountains of the armchair, where they saw to their own business, set off on journeys, and furnished their kitchens, houses, and palaces. His father's ashtray became a boat, and the pen holders were oars, while the space underneath a chair turned into a cathedral where the wedding of the two queens, black and white, was taking place.

Among this race of chess people, he always identified with the knight, who delivered news, made peace between those who were at odds, organized the provisions for expeditions, or warned of dangers (such as Józef's entrance, carpet cleaning, or being summoned for lunch). Then, when chided by his father, or sent to his room without supper as a punishment, he would head off with the dignity of a knight—two steps forward and one to the side.

Mieczyś applied himself most to mathematics and chemistry, as his father wanted him to, and in the belief that his father knew better than he did. But he was fascinated by Latin,

THE BATH

The spider, like some cave-dweller, so transparent
she could be a lens.

Look through me, she might lure even
the smallest creature coming near enough for closure,
for its own world's end.

How intimate and shocking to be fooled, to be
wrapped snug in the thinnest silver
for the end of that world
however it lived moments ago having

wings or claws or antennas, none
weightier than an eyelash, buzzing
to a mate or against prey
but here how silent suddenly.

For such tiny inhumanity—

The spider comes spooling down
on its own silk, dropping
far from the overhead light. As if
the ceiling's fault or day's

open window or because there's
nowhere else to set up shop.

To be honest, I barely
saw the thread. Or her, for that matter,
she is so pale.

To be astonished and looking up
is to shrink to a nub I once was or will be.

She doubles back so close to the ceiling,
two of her now, the real thing
and, right above, her shadow, which overlords
the dark mission, legs
thickened, frantic as exclamation points or
a disarray of commas.

I rattle around beneath. I'm drying off,
a muffled noise paused, still
staring up—

one step out of the bath
while an equal looks down.

—Marianne Boruch

and if he could have he would have devoted most of his time to it. The Latin master, the tiny, rather comical Mr. Amborski, lent him books, of which Mieczyś's favorite was "The Golden Ass," by Apuleius. It was an old edition, in the Bibliotheca Scriptorum Graecorum et Romanorum Teubneriana series, but it proved too difficult for a beginner to read. So the kind Mr. Amborski found and gifted him a German translation by August Rode, and Mieczyś came to know this version almost by heart, enjoying the text wherever he opened it. It was the only book he loved, and nothing else had ever made such a great impression on him. Somehow the picaresque tale of an unlucky man transformed into a donkey suited him personally. He felt a kinship with Lucius, though of course they differed in terms of courage, sense of humor, and curiosity about the world. Lucius was the hero, but he smiled wryly from the pages of the book, ironically, contesting his own hero status, conscious of his own absurdity.

Mieczyś wanted to be just like Lucius: cunning, cheeky, and self-confident. He could even have accepted Lucius' naïveté, which proved to be a good quality that always led to unexpected places, down the alleyways of life, where one might experience a sudden or even a violent transformation. Where one might change and become unrecognizable, and yet still remain one's real self inside. Clearly there was both an outer and an inner existence. The "internal" one was dressed in the "external" one, and from then on was perceived by the world in that form. But, Mieczyś wondered, why might the "internal" feel so uncomfortable inside the "external"? Lucius' adventures were like dreadful torments, because the danger of never managing to return to his own shape was always hanging over him, the threat that he would die as a donkey, and that his real nature, his internal existence, would never be recognized! Mieczyś was deeply affected by this drama, though of course he did not confide in anyone about it. Lucius seemed less upset by his situation than the boy reader was; with his roguish, ironical smirk, Lucius stuck fast to the horizon of Mieczyś's world, as a donkey and as a person all at once, believing that one day he would find his rosebush, and that his metamorphosis would occur by command of the mightiest goddess.

Whenever Uncle Emil was due to arrive in Lwów, special preparations were made. Józef would run to the shops and always return with a duck in a basket, while a boy from the market helped to bring in the vegetables and apples—apples were a must.

Emil was a tall, handsome, fair-haired young man with a flaxen mustache that gave his youthful, delicate features gravity and manliness. His blue-gray jacket beautifully hugged his slender torso and lent his skin a refined pallor. But finest of all—as Mieczyś saw it—were the red breeches tucked into knee-high, wonderfully polished boots. Emil would arrive, click his heels, and immediately light a cigar, in which the boy's father kept him company. Mieczyś would receive from his uncle a box of cakes from the pâtisserie and some military trinket or other: cartridge cases, a penknife or a mess tin. Then he would have to answer his uncle's questions, which, as he had learned everything inside out, he did convincingly and with great confidence: "A cavalry division consists of two brigades with two regiments each." Or "A cavalry regiment includes six troops." He also had to add that each division had under it a special horse-artillery division and four machine-gun subunits. It was from these guns that the cartridge cases came, though Mieczyś was not quite sure what to do with them. He simply carried them in his pocket and felt their pleasant weight.

Once, in the night, Mieczyś got up to pee and, still half asleep, came upon his uncle in the bathroom. Emil had a band stretched over his mustache which bisected his face, flattening his features and making his handsome countenance look grotesque and funny, like the face of a puppet. His trousers were down around his ankles, exposing his hairy legs and the brownish gherkin hanging between them. Somehow it seemed to Mieczyś unfitting for a military man to be carrying such a wilted fruit in his trousers.

The day before Uncle Emil's arrival, as soon as he had done the shopping, Józef would go down to the cellar to cut off the duck's head, and then all afternoon the bird would hang tied

to the metal trim above the tile stove, with the stump of its neck downward over a bowl, into which the blood dripped slowly, drop by drop.

Mieczyś had already learned from earlier pain and regret that on no account should he befriend the duck brought home from the market; he must not feel sorry for it, so he ignored the pitiful, sometimes indignant quacking before it went to the slaughter and blocked his ears to avoid witnessing its brief presence in the house.

But the bleeding, feathery shred tied above the stove filled him with despair and induced doleful, helpless weeping, which he was obliged to hide from his father, his uncle, and even Józef. They would have said that he was whining like a woman. The horrible sight of the dark-red, almost brown blood congealing on the stump forced him into a painful ambivalence, in which he felt afraid, while also feeling a strange, indescribable fascination close to pleasure, far mightier than picking scabs off his knees or teasing an already wobbly milk tooth. His chest was racked by sorrow that could not change into weeping or relief of any kind but just went on pushing from the inside, paralyzing his lungs. For there was a mysterious bond between him and the dead, headless duck as the blood dripped from it, a physical sensation, a feeling of faintness and weakness arising from total defenselessness. The horror was completed by the beauty of the feathers, sticky with blood but shimmering wonderfully in the light of the kitchen, dark blue and golden, inky and greenish, azure, sapphire—there were no names for them, but they unerringly reminded him of the wings of the Four-Fingered Angel. So the duck's death became blasphemy, an attack on the entire world.

But the worst was yet to come. Whenever, with Józef's help, the blood, vinegar, prunes, and dried cherries, and seasoning such as allspice, bay leaves, marjoram, and pepper, were used to produce *czernina*—duck's-blood soup—Mieczyś knew what torment lay ahead. A plate of this soup would be placed in front of him, as yet another test of maturity to be conducted in the presence of his uncle, the officer. But his father and Emil would not betray any awareness that this was an exceptional, very special situation. They would chat away to each other, usually about business or politics, not yet about whether Emil was planning to marry—this question would arise only over liqueurs. Meanwhile, Mieczyś would be sitting over the plate of chocolate-colored matter full of beads of fat, with his napkin under his chin, feeling tense, helpless against the saliva that was gathering in his mouth and that his constricted throat refused to swallow.

Then his father would cast him a fleeting glance, and, as if sentenced to torture, Mieczyś would pick up his spoon and plunge it into the dark goo. At this point, Emil would be rolling his eyes, saying, with a sigh, that it was the best thing he had eaten in all his life. The satisfaction expressed in these compliments brightened the usually gloomy countenance of Józef, who would not depart for the kitchen, demanding more praise with his presence. Mieczyś knew that the men's eyes were about to turn to him, so he negotiated with himself internally, explaining to himself that he had to do it, that he could not disappoint his two favorite people, who wanted the best for him, and that to be a real man he needed to master himself, because they were serving him this dish out of love. Then tears would come to his eyes, and the spoon, shaking and spilling drops of soup, would rise to his mouth, which could do nothing but open and receive this offering. He always hoped that his memory of the taste of *czernina* from the previous occasions was wrong, and that now it would suddenly turn out to be surprisingly good. But once again something uniquely horrible filled his mouth, tinged by the flavors of bay and marjoram and lacquered by a butter brush, but nevertheless disgusting and revolting. It was a taste that screamed, full of violence, steaming, pushing its way between his tongue and cheeks, sweet and sickly. His throat tightened, and he felt the urge to vomit, but was able to control it, to ignore it, so that, after a moment of hesitation, it retreated deep inside his body, disappearing into his intestines, and the helping of boiled animal blood flowed down into his stomach. His father and uncle pretended not to be watching him, but he knew that it was a test and that they were observing him closely and coldly from the corners of their eyes. As he took another spoonful, then another, his father would calm down and start to make jokes. Tears would fill the boy's eyes, but he ignored them, too, making them vanish somewhere far down in his body.

"This is a traditional Polish soup. Only a simpleton won't try it. And how much brawn it gives you!" his father said jovially.

Uncle Emil smiled, and the tips of his flaxen mustache took on a dark-red color.

It's simple, Mieczyś would be thinking as he swallowed his tears, which mingled with animal blood inside his puny child's body. Being a man means learning to ignore whatever causes trouble. That's the whole mystery.

He was as he was. He couldn't help it. He thought of himself as normal. He once tried to explain this to his father, but he could not find the right words. Then he thought about the mysteries of yeast cake rising, or about a pigeon that had laid a sad egg in the recess of a blank window.

A vivid image appeared before his eyes, of the old house in the country, and of underclothes drying in the attic in winter, when it was pouring outside and Gliceria took them up there in pails. He could clearly see the attic, always full of dust, and the view from its small windows, known as bull's-eyes—fields and a small park, with the acrid smell of rotting tomato stalks, sweet corn, and beans on poles. And by the laws of some inexplicable synesthesia this image changed into a physical sensation: the coarseness of fabric, the stiffness of collars, the angularity of freshly pressed trousers, and the pinch of a hard leather belt. And it was there, in the attic, as soon as he could, whenever he was alone and out of reach of his father's discipline, that he undressed entirely; he would wrap his naked body in a satin tablecloth edged with soft fringe, and, feeling how blissfully it brushed against his thighs and calves, he would think how wonderful it would be if people could go about in tablecloth tunics, like the ancient Greeks. ♦

(Translated, from the Polish, by Antonia Lloyd-Jones.)

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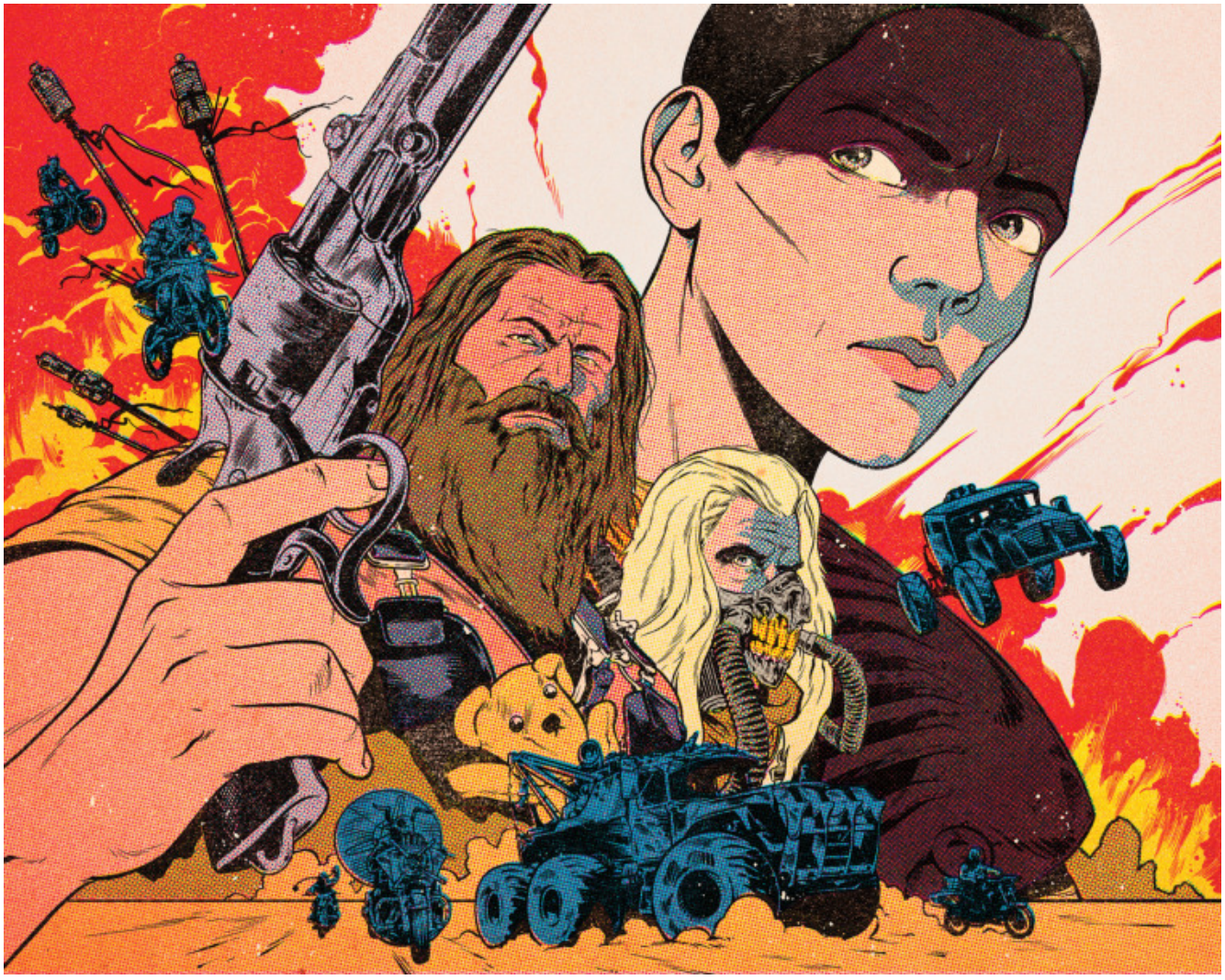

THE CURRENT CINEMA

MAXED OUT

"Furiosa: A Mad Max Saga."

BY JUSTIN CHANG

The last time we saw Imperator Furiosa, in the dystopian chase thriller "Mad Max: Fury Road" (2015), she had just returned from the heat of battle, her face streaked with blood, one eye swollen shut, her body so fatigued and battered that she could hardly stand. Furiosa, played by a stupendous Charlize Theron, had spent several days and nights driving an enormous truck, the War Rig, across miles of open desert, withstanding fiery assaults, a lethal sandstorm, and the surly company of a reluctant ally named Max (Tom Hardy). But triumph, at last, was hers: the vile warlord Immortan Joe (Hugh Keays-Byrne) lay dead at her feet, and hundreds of newly liberated desert dwellers were erupting in celebration. Amid the chaos, Furiosa scanned the crowd for Max and caught him slinking away. For a moment, he looked back and gave her an approving nod—then turned and vanished into the throng.

On one level, this is how all the "Mad Max" movies have ended: with Max going it quietly alone, moving on to his

In George Miller's latest, Anya Taylor-Joy plays a younger version of the heroine memorably introduced by Charlize Theron.

ILLUSTRATION BY JOHNNY DOMBROWSKI

next infernal adventure. The Australian writer and director George Miller conceived the character—played, in the first three films, by a broodingly effective Mel Gibson—as a classic loner anti-hero in a near-future verging on social and economic collapse. The original "Mad Max" (1979), Miller's scrappily potent début feature, introduced Max as a police officer behind the wheel of a black muscle car, prized for his skill at pursuing lawbreakers at high speeds. Personal tragedy brought Max low and turned him loose; his wife and young child were murdered by an outlaw biker gang, and, even after he avenged them, grief and rage had clearly destroyed any lingering hope of human connection. By the arrival of a sequel, "The Road Warrior" (1981), Max had become a gun-for-hire nomad, driving across a vaguely Australian landscape, where every highway was a potential battlefield. He might still join a fight or a noble cause, but only if the price was right, and with no promise of loyalty. Now, and in the following film, "Mad Max Beyond Thunderdome" (1985), his only aims were to survive and keep moving.

Why, then, did Max's exit in "Fury Road" trigger such an onrush of emotion? The answer is Furiosa. For once, Max had met his match in road warriorship—an equally skilled driver, a better sniper, and a fellow avatar of taciturn grit. There were differences, too: Furiosa had lost her left arm in unexplained circumstances, and did her driving and fighting with the aid of a robotic limb. Crucially, unlike Max, she was invested in something more than personal survival. The plot of "Fury Road" was set in motion by her decision to free Immortan Joe's five young "wives" from sexual bondage, a gesture that turned out to be anything but casual or blandly altruistic. Furiosa, we learned, had been born into—and kidnapped from—a matriarchal society called the Vuvalini, a lost sisterhood to which she desperately wished to return. For all her battle-hardened toughness, she was, in Theron's fiercely felt performance, very much a child longing for home.

She was also a reminder that a life scarred by tragedy need not be doomed to nihilistic solitude, and that made her a moral counterweight to Max. One of the thrills of "Fury Road" was its willingness to interrogate and even disrupt the long-standing foundations of the series. In taking up a new question—how would women cope with the end of a world dominated and destroyed by men?—Miller ingeniously remapped his own dystopia and tapped into fresh reserves of audience pleasure. When Max passed his rifle to Furiosa and invited her to take a difficult shot, conceding her superior marksmanship, we watched as one hard-bitten hero passed his baton to the next. Or, because this asphalt-hungry franchise was built for vehicular metaphors, we watched as Max took a back seat in what had looked, until then, like his story alone.

"If that's my only option, I'd rather go without."

Now, nine years on from "Fury Road," Miller brings us a "Mad Max" film in which Max himself is almost entirely absent. Miller says that he will be back, likely still played by Hardy, in future sequels, but the new movie, "Furiosa: A Mad Max Saga" is a prequel, filling in Furiosa's origin story. (Miller co-wrote the script, with Nico Lathouris.) Unfolding like the darkest of fairy tales, it recounts how a girl, mesmeric of gaze and flinty of spirit, is stolen from her home and forever transformed, through a crucible of unrelenting physical and psychological brutality. At one point, the director considered having Theron reprise the role of Furiosa, using digital de-aging effects. He ended up casting two younger actresses instead: Alyla Browne plays her as a child, and Anya Taylor-Joy plays her as a young woman.

The tale begins, post-apocalypse, in

the Green Place of the Many Mothers, a lush oasis tucked away amid towering desert dunes. Here dwell the Vuvalini, who have taken refuge from a world ravaged by oil wars, environmental blight, and unceasing violence. One of the first things you notice is that the young Furiosa (Browne) is already named Furiosa; it isn't some moniker she acquired after plowing her pickup truck into the school prom. It's the name she was presumably given by her mother, Mary Jabassa (Charlee Fraser), who must have sensed her daughter's ferocity in the womb—or who knew that, whatever the child's temperament, such a name might well armor her against a world defined by rage.

"Furiosa," in other words, is both an end-of-days thriller and an Edenic parable, Revelation and Genesis rolled into one. The first thing we see the young Furiosa do is pluck a piece of fruit, signalling an imminent fall from grace. Within moments, she is kidnapped by male marauders on motorcycles, who tie her up and whisk her off into the burnt-orange desert. Mary valiantly gives chase, but her pursuit ends in brutal defeat, and Miller distills the horror of mother-daughter separation into a single devastating shot—a near-crucifixion, to continue the religious imagery—seared, with a diabolical flourish, into Furiosa's ultra-magnified pupil. She will spend the rest of the film seeking revenge against her captors, specifically their leader, Dementus (Chris Hemsworth), a swarthy, malevolent warlord whose most prized and perverse accessory is a Teddy bear, usually worn dangling from his leather gear. *Don't* suffer the little children to come unto him.

Dementus's voice, equal parts merriment and menace, is recognizably Hemsworth's, though the actor's features have been obscured by a mangy beard and a bulbous prosthetic schnoz; without them, perhaps, he might have looked a bit too much like his most famous character, Thor, gone to goth-biker seed. In time, Dementus and his gang will forge a most unholy alliance with the young Immortan Joe (Lachy Hulme), who huffs and puffs through a mask of rotted metal that resembles the world's grodiest CPAP machine. Immortan Joe oversees a mighty desert citadel, where he is served by fanatical young followers known as War Boys: you may remember them from "Fury Road," screaming, "I am awaited in Valhalla!" right before they hurled themselves, like suicide bombers, to a fiery doom. Higher up in the ranks are various unsavories with names like Scrotus, Rictus Erectus, the People Eater, the Organic Mechanic, and the Bullet Farmer. Even after two viewings of "Furiosa," I confess that

I can scarcely tell these grotesques apart, let alone make sense of their roles within Immortan Joe's fascist circle. It's of little consequence; one way or another, Furiosa, lusting for freedom and revenge, will outwit them all.

She will accomplish this, in part, by disguising herself as a boy and working undercover in Immortan Joe's hellish garage, where construction of the War Rig is under way. It's around this time that Anya Taylor-Joy steps into the role—in one of the most seamless actor-to-actor transitions I can remember—and shows us Furiosa's way forward: through an apprenticeship of flame and steel, carried out in the company of dangerous men. In passing herself off as one of them, Furiosa buries her femininity and hones her mechanical skills, like an antipodean Mulan. But Mulan, stealth gender bender though she was, ultimately undertook her deception to serve an empire. Furiosa means to subvert one—to escape it and, in the end, destroy it from within.

Women haven't always held such a powerful or prominent place in Miller's films. The sole memorable female character in the first "Mad Max" was Max's wife, Jessie (Joanne Samuel), who dotes on her cop husband and worries constantly for his safety. Their moments together with their son at a seaside retreat are almost sacred in their sense of domestic contentment: "Crazy about you," Jessie coos to Max as he heads out on his next perilous mission. Watch that exchange again and see how the tenderness of their marital rapport corresponds to the relative lushness of the scenery: the ocean waves lapping at the shores, the greenery outside their window. The apocalypse, for now, is still a work in progress. In time, there will be only dirt and gravel and dust—and Max's aching memories of Jessie and their son.

Like a jalopy of jammed-together old parts, "Mad Max" was assembled from several influences: classic Westerns, Buster Keaton stunts, Chuck Jones's Road Runner cartoons, the 1973 oil crisis. Another key inspiration: before Miller became a filmmaker, he was a doctor, and the horrific injuries he witnessed in the emergency room, many the result of car crashes, did their part to fire his imagination. For a newbie director, practicing medicine on the side doubtless had its financial as well as creative uses. Miller's hospital work helped replenish the indie coffers; Max derives his surname, Rockatansky, from the nineteenth-century Austrian physician Carl von Rokitansky, who pioneered a method of examining organs at autopsies to determine the cause of death. An appreciation for viscera certainly suffuses the series, but what you remember from a "Mad Max" movie isn't the extremity of the carnage; it's the breathtaking clarity of the action. That quality, too, derives from Miller's scientific mind. You sense in all his work a continual desire to lay out cause and effect, to ground even his most outlandish inventions in realism. The violence in his movies doesn't merely convey sensation and impact; it has tremendous integrity.

"Mad Max" was a huge success; made for less than five hundred thousand dollars, it grossed more than a hundred million worldwide. "The Road Warrior" proved an even greater triumph, critically and commercially. Miller's storytelling was tighter, and his world-building had deepened. Society's descent into flaming anarchy was fleshed out in a grimly expository prologue: in a wasteland where most matters were settled via high-speed car chase, gasoline had become the single most important resource, so the story centered on a besieged oil compound. Where "Mad Max" announced an exciting new talent, the sequel confirmed that Miller was here to stay.

The next film, "Beyond Thunderdome," which Miller directed with George

Ogilvie, is less fondly remembered than its two predecessors. It's an unusual "Mad Max" adventure, sporting less of the series' signature gonzo vehicular action, a greater focus on young characters, and a curiously buoyant, optimistic spirit; it even secured a PG-13 rating. Though it was less successful than its progenitors, its pleasures are too eccentric and manifold to be dismissed. Chief among them was the gladiatorial arena called Thunderdome, a steel-cage marvel in which Max and his opponent dangled from elastic cables, springing and soaring through the air to attack each other with whatever weapons—spears, mallets, chainsaws—came to hand. The movie also planted the seed of gender parity that would flower in "Fury Road," by giving us the saga's first pillar of female strength, a town leader known as Aunty Entity. Wickedly calculating but not wholly devoid of heart or mercy, she was played, in the film's greatest coup, by a cackling, resplendent Tina Turner.

In the thirty years that elapsed between "Beyond Thunderdome" and "Fury Road," Miller built an eclectic but highly successful directing career, with an output that includes the supernatural dark comedy "The Witches of Eastwick" (1987), the wrenching medical drama "Lorenzo's Oil" (1992), and the upbeat, Oscar-winning animated feature "Happy Feet" (2006). He had hoped to return to "Mad Max" sooner: "Fury Road" was announced in 2002, and Gibson, his body then still in fighting shape and his reputation as yet undamaged, was expected to reprise the role of Max. By the time the cameras rolled, years later, he had been replaced by Hardy, and the long-gestating project had become less a sequel than a reboot—an opportunity to resurrect the series for a new generation of moviegoers.

"Fury Road" was conceived as essentially a two-hour chase scene, with only brief interludes of downtime. It features the most sustained action and the most astoundingly acrobatic stunts of the franchise, and, despite the added layers of studio gloss, Miller sought to minimize digital manipulations and film with as many live-action and in-camera effects as possible. That meant a tougher shoot: made in Namibia and beset by constant delays, "Fury Road" ranks among the most ambitious and difficult productions in recent Hollywood history, but it is also proof that some of the greatest pictures emerge from adversity and risk. Released in May, 2015, it drew raves, became the highest-grossing "Mad Max" movie, and was nominated for ten Academy Awards, ultimately winning six. It remains the zenith of the series, a sand-blasted masterwork of viscerally pure cinema, made with a coherence, rigor, and imaginative audacity that have all but vanished from the C.G.I.-heavy content mill we call Hollywood.

Its cultural resonance is no less significant. "Fury Road" appeared more than two years before #MeToo took hold in the entertainment industry, and its decrying of sexual violence now feels uncannily prescient for Hollywood. So does the figure of Furiosa herself, who, unlike some of the regulation Strong Female Characters that have since rolled off the studios' comic-book-movie assembly lines, never seemed like a cynical bid for representational cred. She reads like a character who had to exist and who may, in fact, have always existed, just waiting for the right story—and the right actress—to break her loose.

As thrilling and beautifully made as it is, "Furiosa" isn't—and isn't trying to be—the tightly honed tour de force that its immediate forerunner was. Miller seems to be almost preëmpting the inevitable comparisons with the predecessor by attempting something conspicuously different. Where "Fury Road" travelled from west to east to west, moving cleanly along a practically straight line, "Furiosa" spills out across the desert in all directions. And where the previous film unfolded a tautly structured, turbocharged story over a few days, "Furiosa" forsakes speed and momentum for a discursive two-and-a-half-hour sprawl, stretching out across some fifteen years and segmenting its narrative into five windily titled chapters. The story it tells is illuminating, but I'm not sure that the earlier film didn't already tell it better. One of the triumphs of "Fury Road" was how fully expressive and persuasively realized the character of Furiosa was, even with only a few terse dribbles of backstory: "I was taken as a child" is about the extent of her recap. She doesn't say much, and she doesn't have to; she comes to the movie fully formed.

The searing power of Theron's performance is a tough thing for a young performer to match, even one as skilled, as assured in her physicality, and as eloquent in her silence as Taylor-Joy. This isn't the first time she has played a young woman driven, by a steel-trap mind and a cruel orphanhood, to pursue an outsized greatness. To watch her in "The Queen's Gambit" is to behold a proto-Furiosa of the chess world, brilliantly strategizing her way to victory. Would Beth Harmon, though, for all her game-changing ingenuity, have gone to the lengths to which Furiosa is willing to go? (We know that, somewhere along the way in "Furiosa," our heroine will lose her arm, occasioning a grisly image that harks back to a memorable moment from the first "Mad Max.") Taylor-Joy's commitment and ferocity are unimpeachable, but her icy sombreness can feel a bit one-note, and it strikes perhaps too stark a contrast with Theron's vivid warmth. Even when the young Furiosa slices off her hair and smears dark grease across her brow like war paint, only fitfully do you feel a bone-deep connection with the Furiosa of old—a sense that we are truly beholding an earlier version of the character in the oil-slicked flesh.

Where Taylor-Joy convinces, however, is where it counts most: the action. In the movie's finest sequence, which at once distills and elaborates on the Looney-Tunes-on-wheels inventiveness of "Fury Road," Furiosa is again in the War Rig and paired with a male fellow-traveller. This one is a stout-hearted fellow named Praetorian Jack (a terrific Tom Burke), who's driving the truck when it comes under attack. Suddenly, the camera seems to be everywhere: it dives into the truck's undercarriage, where Furiosa has either cleverly or foolishly stowed away; follows her into the passenger seat, where she and Jack join forces; and chases her up to the top of the rig, just in time to blow up a hang-gliding enemy. Miller stretches out this delirious set piece to a luxurious length, tugging the mayhem in every possible direction. The whooshing camera movements are impossibly fluid; the score's drumbeats have the intensity of a religious ritual. The upshot, still, is an almost primal exhilaration—a sense of sheer satisfaction and play that is every moviegoer's birthright. For a glorious moment, we are all awaited in Valhalla. ♦

BOOKS

HIGHER AND HIGHER

To preserve humanity—and the planet—should we give up growth?

BY IDREES KAHLOON

The pattern of economic growth is, historically, a startlingly recent development.

In April, 1968, a consequential meeting took place in the Villa Farnesina, a stately Roman home built for Pope Julius II's treasurer and adorned with frescoes by Raphael. The conveners were Alexander King, a Scottish chemist who directed scientific affairs for the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, and Aurelio Peccei, an Italian industrialist who simultaneously held executive positions at the automaker Fiat, the typewriter manufacturer Olivetti, and a large consulting firm. Like many modern friendships, King and Peccei's was cemented by a shared deep-seated anxiety. They gave the object of their concern a grand name: the "world problématique," meaning the interrelated cultural, political, and environmental conflicts that threatened humanity. But the organization they launched came to be known, more simply, as the Club of Rome. Its mission, in Peccei's words, was to "rebel against the suicidal ignorance of the human condition."

Within a couple of years, the club recruited a brilliant M.I.T. systems analyst named Jay Forrester, and he and his colleagues set about building a computer model to capture the linkages between booming resource consumption, population growth, and ecological exhaustion. The conclusions reached by World3, as the whizzy model was called, were laid out in "The Limits to Growth," a book that the Club of Rome published in 1972. World3 glumly predicted that humanity was despoiling nature so fast that civilizational collapse would occur "sometime within the next one hundred years." In bloodless mathematical terms, this was the result of an exponential function outpacing a linear one. In more vivid biological terms, we were like a colony of yeast mindlessly feeding on a pile of grapes, and soon to perish from the effluvia of our rapid growth (ethanol in the case of yeast, environmental pollution in the case of humans). "Deliberately limiting growth would be difficult, but not impossible," the book maintained. "A decision to do nothing is a decision to increase the risk of collapse." It sold millions of copies in more than thirty languages.

For all of that, growth continued rather yeastily. In the fifty years since this manifesto, the American economy has increased fourfold, far outstripping the country's population, which has increased by sixty per cent. For the rest of the world, growth during this period has been even more dramatic. The global economy has become twenty-six times bigger—or twelve times higher per person. In 1970, half of humanity lived in extreme poverty, subsisting on less than two dollars a day. Today, only a tenth of the global population lives in extreme poverty. As astonishing as this growth engine has been to behold, we do seem to be choking on its exhaust. When "The Limits to Growth" was published, humanity had, in its history as a species, emitted half a trillion tons of carbon dioxide into the environment. We belched out triple that amount in the ensuing years. The world was just 0.4 degrees Celsius warmer than the pre-industrial average back then; last year, it was 1.5 degrees warmer, and on track to hit three degrees by the end of the century, at which point all kinds of cataclysms are expected—polar ice caps petering out, swollen oceans swallowing the coasts, almighty wildfires, famine, and more.

Accordingly, the Club of Rome's arguments are being recapitulated today—with even greater urgency and moral force behind them. "We are in the beginning of a mass extinction, and all you can talk about is money and fairy tales of eternal economic growth," the Swedish climate

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ILLUSTRATION BY CARL GODFREY

activist Greta Thunberg told the United Nations in 2019. "The eyes of all future generations are upon you. And, if you choose to fail us, I say we will never forgive you." But there is another moral claim to consider. Idling the great machinery of the global economy seems cruel to the striving masses who have not yet reached comfortable material standards. Then, there are the realities of democratic politics. Few members of the affluent world would selflessly swear off all future growth for the sake of the climate, let alone for the billions in Asia and Africa who are not nearly so prosperous. Is there any good way forward?

The paradox of growth—that we suffer from both too much of it and too little of it—is the subject of "Growth: A History and a Reckoning" (Belknap), by Daniel Susskind, an economist at King's College London. A world without growth is difficult for modern people to comprehend, but it characterized most of human history. An advanced ancient civilization like the Minoan, on the island of Crete—the legendary home of Daedalus, Icarus, and the Minotaur—could boast an average life expectancy of a little more than thirty years. Leap forward three millennia, to 1770, and you find that the average life expectancy on the European continent had increased only to something like thirty-four years. Genealogical records from the nine centuries between 800 and 1700 reveal no life-span gains even for European noblemen, the most privileged class, who typically died in their fifties. (Within certain parameters, longevity has proved a good proxy for affluence.) Remarkably careful records kept by the English on the wages of builders show essentially no improvement relative to the cost of living up until 1800—and this in one of the richest societies in the world at the time.

These millennia of stagnation are what led to the 1798 publication of Thomas Malthus's "An Essay on the Principle of Population," which claimed that there were inescapable limits on human flourishing. Malthus, who did much to give economics its reputation as the "dismal science," presaged the thesis of "The Limits to Growth": his arguments relied on the disparity between a naturally exponential curve (population) and a slower, linear series (our capacity to produce food). These days, "Malthusianism" is often used pejoratively to refer to a discredited theory, and yet his was descriptively correct at the time of its début. Hunter-gatherers, medieval peasants, and eighteenth-century laborers, economic historians say, had similar living standards, eking out lives of subsistence.

"Modern economic growth began just two hundred years ago," Susskind writes. "If the sum of human history were an hour long, then this reversal in fortune took place in the last couple of seconds." The turning point, which some economists call the Great Divergence, came with the Industrial Revolution, which triggered an explosion in prosperity in Europe and North America, and led to the sustained worldwide growth that humans are still enjoying today. Susskind's narration properly captures the astonishing triumph of these shifts. Complaining about too much growth is a bit like complaining about too much democracy: once you consider a world without it, you might find your feelings tempered.

How did we arrive at the contemporary fixation on growth? The concept of gross domestic product (originally gross national product) is less than a century old. It was not until 1933 that Simon Kuznets, a government economist who later won a Nobel Prize, was commissioned to create a systematic series of national accounts. When Franklin D. Roosevelt was campaigning for reëlection in 1936 at Forbes Field, where the Pittsburgh Pirates once played, he explained the task of assessing the national economy by analogy: "A baseball park is a good place to talk about box scores. Tonight, I am going to talk to you about the box score of the government of the United States." Even from the start, Kuznets grasped that he was measuring the sum total of marketized output, not of human welfare. After publishing his proposed metric, he noted the obvious omission of "services of housewives and other members of the family" and argued for the exclusion of expenditures he considered socially unproductive, such as military spending, consumer marketing, and financial speculation. John Maynard Keynes disagreed. He maintained that G.N.P. ought to be a descriptive measure that included military spending, among other governmental expenditures, to help with macroeconomic planning, instead of the half-descriptive, half-normative measure that Kuznets favored. The looming World War helped Keynes win the debate.

This decisive settlement would set the track for economics as it took up new questions that revolutionized the field: What causes growth, and how do people get more of it? Susskind even contends that the most important economic meeting in 1944 was not the Bretton Woods Conference, in which the United States and the United Kingdom thrashed out the system of global capitalism that would reign supreme after the end of the Second World War, but a little-known gathering at which government statisticians standardized the system of national economic accounts. In the ensuing decades, brilliant economists would labor over dazzling models that tried to compress the enormous social complexity of human beings—our ability to generate technological innovations, our capacity to educate ourselves, our stabilizing institutions like the rule of law and property rights—into the concise language of mathematics. This improved our understanding of how humans prospered, but only along the lines of a particular kind of growth that had always been contested.

Indeed, the moral debate over growth statistics, present at their creation, never abated. You can see this in the disagreement between John F. Kennedy and his brother Robert. When J.F.K. was running for President, he said that "the first and most comprehensive failure in our performance has been in our rate of economic growth," particularly in relation to the (seemingly) rapidly expanding Soviet Union. Eight years later, when R.F.K. was campaigning for the Presidency, he assailed G.N.P. as a worthless statistic: "It measures neither our wit nor our courage, neither our wisdom nor our learning, neither our compassion nor our devotion to our country. It measures everything, in short, except that which makes life worthwhile." Soviet planners, for their part, rejected capitalist growth statistics in favor of a measure aligned with their socialist values, the "net material product," which excluded activities deemed "non-productive," such as banking, housing, and health care. Analysts

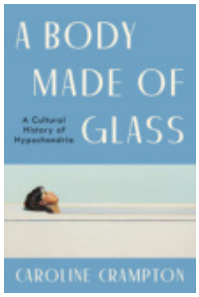
at the C.I.A. spent decades poring over those alternative statistics to estimate the actual size of the Soviet economy and especially the scale of its military expenditures. Their failure to do so correctly was one reason that the New York senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan argued for the agency's dismantling in 1991.

Criticisms of G.D.P. remain plentiful, and justly so. It still misses what is priceless about life. Leaving a forest alone does nothing for G.D.P., but cutting it down for lumber shows up as a positive contribution. Heart attacks that result in expensive ambulance trips and intensive-care stays appear immediately in consumption statistics; the benefits of heading off heart attacks by statins and preventive care may not leave a mark for decades. Hurricanes and wildfires boost output because of spending on emergency aid and reconstruction. Modern-day acolytes of Kuznets propose various modifications to G.D.P.—for instance, using "natural capital" accounting to capture the cost of depleting natural resources (something the Biden Administration is exploring); including estimates of black-market income generated through organized crime and illegal sex work (currently required by the European Union); and incorporating alternative measures that expressly penalize income inequality (like the so-called Genuine Progress Indicator).

Susskind is impatient with all this technocratic tinkering. He agrees that G.D.P. has conceptual failings and that the single-minded pursuit of it has been "climate-destroying, inequality-creating, work-threatening, politics-undermining, and community-disrupting," but he dismisses the notion that "there is a Platonic calculation out there, an ideal form of GDP that can do everything and please everyone."

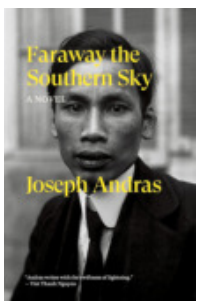
He has even less sympathy for contemporary "degrowthers," who too quickly dismiss the possibility of green growth and whose counsel of self-induced economic recession is, Susskind contends, "akin to driving down a road, knocking over an animal, and reversing back over the corpse to try to fix the problem." Yet, as valuable as Susskind's intellectual history of growth is, his promised reckoning is unsatisfying. After taking aim at the degrowthers, he recommends, confusingly, something he calls "weak

BRIEFLY NOTED



A Body Made of Glass, *by Caroline Crampton (Ecco)*. The author of this thought-provoking exploration of hypochondria—which counts Marcel Proust and Charles Darwin among its sufferers—describes it as a difficulty in identifying "that boundary between fictional and real illness." Delving into the medical literature, Crampton discovers that the conception of hypochondria has shifted greatly during the millennia, from its earliest diagnoses as a liver-and-abdomen complaint to its current unofficial status as a psychological problem ("hypochondriasis" is no longer included in the *DSM*). What emerges is a portrait of a condition that, though nearly as old as recorded human history, continues to elude neat definition, even as it raises urgent questions about "who is believed when they speak of their pain, and who is not."

Little Seed, *by Wei Tchou (Deep Vellum/A Strange Object)*. A family story and a natural history of the fern run in parallel through this memoir, in which chapters alternate between botanical esoterica and descriptions of Tchou's personal life: she grew up in Appalachian Tennessee as the daughter of Chinese immigrants, and she has a brother who, as an adult, is beset by psychotic episodes. The two narratives initially stay on their separate paths, but eventually Tchou finds graceful moments of glancing association, especially on the vexing topic of identity. "My family is rigid about identification with one another and with the whole," she explains. "We lack the flexibility of taxonomists, to allow things to break apart and come back together."



Faraway the Southern Sky, *by Joseph Andras, translated from the French by Simon Leser (Verso)*. This brief but layered novel follows a nameless figure wandering around Paris searching for traces of Ho Chi Minh, who lived there as a young revolutionary, near the end of the First World War. Ho is glimpsed through police files, plaques, and publications on his unlikely path to political power, working as a cook and a photo enlarger while managing his ceaseless political agitation. During the search, scenes of contemporary Parisian life are overlaid with memories of past struggle. In Andras's depiction, the city's history emerges as a deep record of past disruptions—and, perhaps, the stuff of present inspiration (the *gilets jaunes* make an appearance), if an observer is able to draw connections between the eras.

The Ministry of Time, *by Kaliane Bradley (Avid Reader)*. In this compelling début novel, set in the near future, the British government has created a time machine and used it to retrieve a handful of people from other periods of history, referred to as "expats." The book's narrator is a minder for one of them: a nineteenth-century Royal Navy commander and polar explorer. Complications ensue when the narrator, who is Cambodian English, begins to fall in love with her charge, while also closing in on the truth of the mysterious extraction program. Throughout, Bradley meditates on mortality, grief, and imperialism. "Everything that has ever been could have been prevented and none of it was," she writes. "The only thing you can mend is the future."

degrowth." The idea is that we should have somewhat less regard for economic growth and more for legitimate concerns like income equality, environmental conservation, and community preservation. But he gives little guidance on how policymakers ought to weigh these competing measures of human flourishing. He advocates mini-plebiscites that mimic the ancient Athenian assembly as one solution to our political-economy malaise—a curiously utopian proposal.

The degrowth program gains power from defeatism. When economic growth and productivity both went slack after the 2008 global financial crisis, there was much talk of "secular stagnation"—a term coined by the economist Alvin Hansen after the Great Depression to describe a state of low growth, low inflation, and high unemployment that could persist for years. At the same time, problems like the anti-globalization backlash, surging income disparities in the rich world, and a warming planet became more apparent. In "The Rise and Fall of American Growth," a magisterial book published in 2016, the macroeconomist Robert J. Gordon identified major headwinds—increasing inequality, a dysfunctional education system, an aging population, rising government debt—and forecast long-run stagnation for the coming twenty-five years. He thought that real G.D.P. growth per capita would be below one per cent per year, less than half the rate enjoyed by Americans in the preceding century.

Since 2020, though, U.S. growth per person has been more than two per cent—even after taking high inflation into account, and despite the shock of the pandemic. Tight labor markets and low unemployment mean that wage growth has been strongest at the bottom of the income ladder—which is why inequality in the U.S. actually seems to be on a downswing. Those of us who are in our twenties, despite our notorious angst, are richer than prior U.S. generations were at our age, including millennials, Gen X-ers, and boomers. Growth and carbon emissions have decoupled: U.S. annual emissions are seventeen per cent less than the six billion tons emitted in 2007, our all-time maximum. Emissions have to be cut further, and that's a goal of the Inflation Reduction Act, which will spend hundreds of billions of dollars over the next decade on green-energy subsidies. The latest estimates suggest that it will double the pace of carbon-emissions reduction from two per cent per year to four per cent. The Biden Administration hopes that future growth will be shared more equitably in the United States, which is why it has issued requirements for community-benefit agreements that could include child-care facilities, high-wage jobs (preferably of the unionized variety), and Buy American provisions that protect domestic industry.

The political economy of abundance is easier to manage than that of austerity. It is true that growth statistics are biased in their inability to account for what economists call negative externalities, such as pollution. Fixing this does not require eradicating growth, though. The most parsimonious and precise approach—one many economists would favor—would be to tax carbon emissions by an amount equal to their estimated social cost. Because such an intervention is politically unpalatable, some countries, including the United States, have adopted the second-best option of subsidizing domestic green-tech companies, in an attempt to speed decarbonizing. Last year, the European Union unveiled a $272-billion Green Deal Industrial Plan to respond to the American approach; in China, a long-standing policy of state sponsorship of climate industries has made it the undisputed leader in the manufacture of batteries, electric vehicles, and solar panels.

As a practical matter, countries aren't going to forswear growth while great-power competition persists. Neither the U.S. nor China, certainly, would voluntarily give up growth—and the attendant military advantages—for the greater global good. Even the most formidable enemies of Western capitalism have understood the imperative of improving living standards. Karl Marx famously wrote, in his "Critique of the Gotha Program," that the ideal communist society would be governed by the maxim "From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs." It's easy to overlook the previous sentences, in which Marx stipulates that this will happen only "after the productive forces have also increased with the all-around development of the individual, and all the springs of co-operative wealth flow more abundantly." Nikita Khrushchev and other Soviet leaders routinely claimed that their centrally managed economy would inevitably surpass that of the United States. (It never did.) Although the Chinese economy is much more open than the Soviet one, China's Communist Party offers a similar proposition to its citizens: greater material prosperity in exchange for restricted political and civil rights.

As our economy has migrated toward the digital over the material and toward services over goods, the limits to growth have less of a physical basis than World3 had anticipated. In fact, the most serious limits to growth in the U.S. seem to be self-imposed: the artificial scarcity in housing; the regulatory thickets that tend to asphyxiate clean-energy projects no matter how well subsidized; the pockets of monopoly that crop up everywhere; a tax regime incapable of cycling opportunity to those most in need. The risk of another Malthusian cap imposing itself on humanity appears, fortunately, remote. Meanwhile, the degrowthers' iron law—that economic growth is intrinsically self-destructive—has become less and less plausible. "One can imagine continued growth that is directed against pollution, against congestion, against sliced white bread," Robert Solow, a Nobel Prize-winning economist at M.I.T., declared in a rebuttal to "The Limits to Growth" half a century ago.

What was merely theoretical looks more practical now, as the world comes to terms with the immense task of decarbonization—and the immense amounts of capital that process will require. We have more ability than is commonly imagined to shape the kind of growth we will experience in the future. Public policy does not just influence the magnitude of future growth—it can also influence how green, how equally distributed, and how truly welfare-enhancing that growth will be. Capitalism, as it has been practiced throughout the past century, has brought with it plenty of problems; as with any engine, harnessing it properly requires controlling it properly. But the premise that economic expansion is bound to be part of the problem, rather than necessary to the solution, is a myth we'll have to outgrow. ♦

THE NEW YORKER

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ON AND OFF THE MENU

DESERT ISLAND

Tastes of Hawaii abound in Las Vegas.

BY HANNAH GOLDFIELD

Spam, introduced to Hawaii during the Second World War, became a local staple.

Late one recent evening at the California Hotel and Casino, in downtown Las Vegas, a few miles north of the Strip, I tried my luck at a slot machine for the very first time. Fifteen minutes later, I was down by twenty bucks or so—thirty if you count the exorbitant A.T.M. fee I'd been determined to win back—and feeling defeated. No matter; it was time for a vastly surer bet, the real reason I was here. Every night, from 11 P.M. to 6 A.M., the hotel's twenty-four-hour restaurant, the Market Street Café, serves one of Vegas's most iconic dishes. Minutes after I'd been seated at the counter, next to an eighty-seven-year-old woman in oversized sunglasses, a server presented me with a large bowl of Hawaii-style oxtail soup, a glistening, fragrant broth brimming with carrots, celery, and hunks of oxtail bone, from which supple shreds of purple meat loosened easily. It came with a scoop of rice and a hefty pinch of pounded ginger and fresh cilantro. Had I been sick—with a head cold or a longing for Hawaii, or both—I imagine it would have cured me.

If an oxtail soup from Hawaii seems an unlikely thing to eat in Las Vegas, you have a lot to learn about both places, as I did, and still do. Census data from 2020 showed that Clark County, Nevada, which includes Las Vegas, was the U.S. county with the largest population of native Hawaiians outside of Hawaii, a statistic that tells only part of the story. The word "Hawaiian" typically applies to the islands' Indigenous population, descendants of the Polynesians who first settled Hawaii, between 1000 and 1200 A.D., and who were nearly eradicated by the arrival of Europeans, in the late eighteenth century. Other people born and raised on the islands—many of them the descendants of migrant laborers from Japan, Korea, China, the Philippines, Portugal, and Puerto Rico, who came to work on sugarcane and pineapple plantations—are known as kamaaina (residents), "Hawaii people," or "locals." The last of these terms applies even in Vegas, where there are so many Hawaii people that they've given the city an affectionate nickname: the Ninth Island.

The California Hotel—the Cal, to regulars—has played a central role in the Hawaii-to-Vegas pipeline. Opened in 1975 by Sam Boyd, an Oklahoma-born entrepreneur, it was the first property in what would become Boyd Gaming, one of the largest casino-management corporations in the country. According to William Boyd, Sam's son, who wrote the foreword for a book about the hotel from 2008, the Cal was named for its original intended audience, gamblers from California. But, a year in, "we were struggling," William wrote. "One day [my dad] said to me, 'You know, we're going to need a niche market here and that's going to be Hawai'i.'"

After living and working in Honolulu for several years, Sam Boyd had developed an affinity for the islands and their people, whom he found to be "industrious" and who seemed to love gambling, which has always been illegal there. The Cal lured guests from Hawaii with promotions that included discounted airfare, free rooms, and credits for meals at a restaurant called Aloha Specialties, which is still part of the hotel today. The answer to where you vacation when you live in paradise was, apparently, Las Vegas. Gamblers from Hawaii were "unlike anything the Vegas market had experienced," according to one of the 2008 book's authors, Dennis M. Ogawa, a professor emeritus of American studies at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa. Not only did they spend much more money per day than the average tourist, Ogawa writes, but they'd also "arrive in groups,

PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY JASON FULFORD AND TAMARA SHOPSIN

laden with luggage they had filled with gifts for the staff: fresh pineapples, Maui onions, Kona coffee, and boxes of chocolate-covered macadamia nuts."

When I arrived at the Cal on a sunny Monday afternoon, a down-on-his-luck man, slumped in a tree bed on the sidewalk outside, looked up at me with a grin and said, "Aloha." The Cal, and downtown Vegas more broadly, has seen more glamorous days, but, inside, a wholesome sense of nostalgia hung in the air, along with the scent of cigarette smoke. The carpeted floor of the casino was patterned with enormous hibiscus flowers; outside the Ohana conference room, I met a man wearing a midnight-blue T-shirt printed with the word "SPAM" in the brand's signature yellow font—a show of support, he explained, for Spam's parent company, Hormel Foods, which had helped to rehabilitate Maui after the devastating wildfires in 2023. "I thought maybe you were a Spam fanatic," I said. The man, whose name was Gene, laughed and said, "Well, isn't everyone from Hawaii a Spam fanatic?"

Gene was at the Cal for the sort of event that has become commonplace there over the years: a reunion for a high school in Hawaii, in this case Hilo High, class of 1955. (The Maui High class of '53 was meeting on the same dates.) Spam was introduced to the islands when Gene was a child. Originally served to G.I.s stationed there during the Second World War, it became a staple of the local diet, incorporated into everything from musubi—Hawaii's version of onigiri—to saimin, a dashi-based noodle soup. In general, the Cal's clientele seemed to skew elderly; at check-in, the young woman behind the front desk greeted guests in line ahead of me as Auntie and Uncle.

Beyond the hotel, I found a vibrant, multigenerational world of Hawaii people. In the decades after the casino opened, the appeal of Vegas grew as not only a place to vacation but also a place to live. In 1992, the Hawaii-born playwright Edward Sakamoto published a play called "Aloha Las Vegas," about a widower named Wally who is weighing a move from Honolulu. An old friend named Harry, who has already relocated, urges him to do the same. "Aeh, it's a mass exodus to Vegas," Harry says, in Hawaii pidgin. "Lodda people in Hawai'i house-rich and cash-poor." Thirty years later, the line holds up. When I asked Jennifer Vergara, a forty-two-year-old transplant from Honolulu, why so many Hawaii people of her generation had left home, she replied matter-of-factly: "Gentrification. Developers. Inflation." In Honolulu, most of her friends—schoolteachers, policemen—were struggling, and in many cases living with their parents, even after having kids of their own. Better jobs and plentiful real estate beckoned, oasis-like, from the Mojave; in Vegas, Vergara and her husband, who have two kids, are employed as nurses and own a three-bedroom home.

Perhaps nothing so clearly reflects this ongoing exodus as the city's landscape of restaurants. It would be easy to define the food in Vegas by the offerings at its lavish casinos and hotels, many of them pandering to the tastes of high-rolling tourists, all caviar and king crab and Wagyu. But, off the Strip, there are hundreds of humbler, family-run, counter-service establishments, a strip-mall ecosystem reminiscent of greater Los Angeles. From the airport, I drove to a restaurant called 2 Scoops of Aloha, which shares a shopping plaza with two insurance offices, an acne clinic, and an iPhone repair store. There, I ordered what's known in Hawaii as a plate lunch. Born of the hearty appetites of plantation laborers, a plate lunch usually includes two scoops of rice and one of macaroni salad, plus meat or fish. I opted for fried chicken two ways—one portion smothered in a garlicky gravy, the other slicked in a sweet-spicy Korean-style glaze—and a side of poi, a Polynesian dish of boiled taro, pounded into a viscous paste.

The meal illustrated the fusion inherent in the islands' cuisine, a collision of cultures that don't cohere so much as happily coexist. Johnathan Wright, a restaurant reporter for the Las Vegas *Review-Journal* who was raised in Honolulu, defined the cuisine as "whatever I grew up eating": galbi (Korean short ribs), Cantonese roast duck, manapuas (Hawaii's take on baos), Spam. Jeremy Cho, a Korean American professor at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, who was born in Hawaii, told me that he'd been surprised by the city's abundance of Hawaii-style Korean food, distinct from the Korean food you'd encounter in L.A. or Fort Lee, New Jersey. In Vegas, as in his home state, it was easy to find a plate lunch featuring what's known in Hawaii as meat jun, a pancake made of egg-battered beef.

More than one kamaaina described food as closing the gap between the tropics and the desert. "Poke Express, that tastes like home," Vergara said, of a takeout place she frequents. Alysa Andrade, an organizer of Pure Aloha, one of Vegas's Hawaii-themed festivals, founded in 2004, described a boom in restaurants serving "island food," as well as other businesses targeting locals: pool detailing, tribal-tattoo artists, Hawaiian-language classes. "When I go back home, I want to come back here," Andrade told me over a slice of guava cake and chunks of pineapple sprinkled in powdered li hing mui (pickled and dried plum), at Straight Up Cafe, whose menu promises "killah grinds," pidgin for great food. "I like Vegas. I feel like everyone's doing the same thing back home. They're just still in the same place where I left them twenty years ago."

Some people visit Las Vegas in order to feel as though they're somewhere else entirely: Venice, Paris, a post-apocalyptic Earth imagined by Darren Aronofsky. Eating poke in a strip mall, I couldn't help but think about how much better it would taste if I were near the ocean, a salty breeze blowing off the waters where the fish had been caught. But eating poke at 'Ai Pono Cafe, in the high-gloss food court of a brand-new casino called Durango, is transportive, an experience that delivers on the city's promise. Gene Villiatora, 'Ai Pono's chef and owner, moved to Vegas from Hawaii in 1993, "the same night as the grand opening of the MGM Grand," he told me, and worked as a dishwasher at Aloha Specialties, in the Cal, before bouncing around some of the Strip's toniest kitchens and then competing on "Top Chef," in 2008. At Durango, 'Ai Pono's storefront mimics a cartoonish beach shack. Inside, Villiatora serves what he calls "Hawaii street food": a refined spin on a Korean-inspired plate lunch, featuring a strip of tender galbi and a meat jun, griddled golden and crisp; a spectacular fried chicken thigh shellacked in a chili-pepper-guava glaze that tastes strikingly of the juicy fruit. A dozen yards away, on the casino floor, animated bison stampede across the screens of digital slot machines, a game called Buffalo Ascension promising gold. ♦

THE ART WORLD

THE PERFECTIONIST

Why we're still catching up to Brancusi.

BY JACKSON ARN

"Princess X" (1915-16), the phallic-feminine sculpture that shocked Paris.

I am writing about Constantin Brancusi on a machine with rounded corners. Chances are good that you own such a machine, too. Mine is mostly aluminum, but the surface has the faint roughness of ancient stone. The aesthetic, which might be described as austere yet playful, seems right for an object that is both a serious, grownup device and a toy. At different times, it has symbolized human ingenuity, American pluck, sweatshop barbarism, the glorious future, and screen addiction.

My point isn't that Brancusi, the star of a euphoric retrospective at the Centre Pompidou in Paris, invented this aesthetic in his sculptures. More than a hundred years ago, though, he perfected a kind of earthy sleekness that still looks embarrassingly *contemporary*, so fresh that it makes the actual present taste stale. Its peak, against strong competition, can be found in the sixteen svelte, polished, ridiculously cool versions of "Bird in Space" that he made between 1923 and 1940. Some are bronze, some are marble. All could be tinted air. Their shape is something between a quill and a cobra, though maybe it's better to say that they look the way flight feels, or the way flight should feel but never quite does.

It has been almost thirty years since the last big Brancusi show—his works are so fragile and scattered that only the craftiest negotiations can bring them together. "Brancusi," curated by Ariane Coulondre, has managed a hundred and twenty sculptures, plus a slightly cheesy reconstruction of the artist's studio, which he bequeathed to the French state before his death, in 1957. Like most of the show's historical contextualizing, the studio comes early and doesn't linger, allowing the pieces to speak with minimal interruptions. Theme trumps chronology, so we get a sampling of his woodwork, an ark's worth of animals, a vitrine of heads, some androgynous blobs. Why did he sculpt blobs? Why did he sculpt anything? Just savor it, already.

Brancusi was born in 1876, in a Romanian village, and he grew up carving wood when he wasn't herding sheep. In his late twenties, armed with a flute and a few years' training from the Bucharest School of Fine Arts, he set off for Paris, nearly dying of pneumonia along the way. Life in his new city was, at first, only slightly less miserable than the trip that brought him there, but you wouldn't know it from this show—quintessential modernist though he is, there isn't much modernist snarl in his art. A painting by Picasso, to name another provincial who moved to Paris in the early nineteen-hundreds, still stings, but a Brancusi has the tranquillity of a crescent moon. When his work shocked people, he claimed to be puzzled. I can't imagine looking at the twin globes and arched shaft of "Princess X" (1915-16), his portrait of Marie Bonaparte, and *not* seeing a shiny metal penis, but Brancusi insisted that it was "all women, rolled into one." Hard not to read into this some kind of prank, but I never get the sense that Brancusi needs us enough to mess with our heads. If he mocks conventions, it's because he glides past them.

"What drove him?" might be too big a question for any Brancusi exhibition, but we can settle for "What changed him?" The prime suspect is Auguste Rodin, whose sculptures left as deep a dent in the late nineteenth century as Brancusi's did in the twentieth. For several art-history-shaking weeks in 1907, the

CONSTANTIN BRANCUSI / COURTESY © SUCCESSION BRANCUSI / ADAGP, PARIS 2024; PHOTOGRAPH FROM CENTRE POMPIDOU / MNAM-CCI / GEORGES MEGUERDITCHIAN / DIST. RMN-GP

younger man worked as the older one's assistant. If you know any Brancusi quotes, you know "Nothing can grow in the shade of a great tree," the tree being Rodin, and the idea being that Brancusi couldn't have developed had he stuck around any longer.

Probably not. Whatever else it's saying, a Rodin says, "Rodin was here." In his unfinished marble piece "Sleep" (1894), which appears in this show, texture and weight advertise an act of heroic, muscular exertion, which makes it a little shocking to recall that Rodin *wasn't* here in the literal sense; like other distinguished sculptors of the day, he made clay models but left the carving and the casting to his team. Brancusi had helpers, including Isamu Noguchi, but he fully embraced the sweaty side of sculpture, sinking so many hours of carving and polishing into his creations that all signs of exertion disappeared. Look at his Rodinesque take on "Sleep," from 1908, and then at the simplified heads and orbs he made in the years that followed. They bid farewell to, in no particular order, Rodin, representational realism, psychological depth, and solidity, until they almost float away. The pale dinosaur egg of "The Beginning of the World" barely touches its plinth.

In these sculptures, Brancusi appears to be playing a game called How Much Can I Take Away from *X* Before It Stops Being *X*? Sometimes—with his seals, I'd say, or the Tinkertoy tubes of "Torso of a Young Man"—he removes too much. But, when he wins, you have the feeling of looking at an inevitable object; one atom more or less and the spell would be broken. The beauty of this game is that it never ends; iteration, not culmination, is the point. Sketches show him practicing the ruthless sport of simplification, hand barely leaving the page. Fingers get melted down into a dagger; an ear becomes a quick U-turn on the drive from head to back. In 1912, he and his friend Marcel Duchamp were stunned by an enormous airplane propeller, and it shows: only a few years into aviation history, Brancusi had pledged himself to the aerodynamic.

He pares down, but he doesn't purify, exactly. Much as movie stars need a small physical flaw in order to dazzle, the most dazzling Brancusis keep a few of their warts: the bird's bent head in "Maiastra" (1911), say, or the speed-bump nose on "Prometheus" (1911), which stops your eyes from moving over the shiny bronze head too fast. The ice-cream swirl of hair that tops his 1928 portrait of Nancy Cunard, one of many fancy transatlantic types he'd met by then, is the prettiest wart you ever did see, all the vanity and fabulous Jazz Age fizz of this socialite's life trapped in one shape. To understand how much it's doing, try covering it up. Hairless, the sculpture would look like a belly balanced on a foot—still a body, but no longer a person. For Brancusi, the most luxuriant of simplifiers, our useless parts make us who we are.

The longer you spend around these sculptures, in fact, the more luxuriant they get—that's the gift of visiting a roomful of Brancusis instead of one or two. At MOMA, flanked by Mirós or Matisses, a single "Bird in Space" looks sleek. The flock at the Pompidou gives you all the subtler effects, too—the funny little wiggle in some of the birds' lower quarters, for instance, which suggests turbulence before cruising altitude. Nearly as revelatory is the show's collection of Brancusi's photographs, many documenting his work, though what they reveal is still an open question. His friend Man Ray scorned them. Peter Campbell, the longtime art critic for the *London Review of Books*, thought them more enduring works than the sculptures themselves.

For me, they're great works of art criticism, seminars on Brancusi-gazing taught by the world's leading expert. One photograph, of "The Beginning of the World," shows the work's rough wooden pedestal hogging all the attention, so that the tiny egg above gets squashed against the frame's upper edge. It made me realize that the sculpture is funny, in a shaggy-dog way—all that carving for an *egg*? Art historians may never agree on whether Brancusi's bases are sculptures in their own right, but it's clear that their solemn, almost deadpan heaviness—Rodin, with a wink—makes the official sculptures seem brighter and airier. At best, what's below and what's above click together like a setup and a punch line.

My favorite Brancusi picture shows "The Cock" (1924), maybe the most delightful thing he ever made, two ways at once. Head on, the sculpture is tall and cypress-skinny, but a shadow of its profile on the wall has a belly like a serrated knife. It's a neat illustration of Brancusi's conception of his sculptures as rotating objects, flashing their fronts and sides and backs at a viewer. Some of them, like the twinkling swan "Leda" (1926), actually do rotate. Others suggest centrifugal force as concisely as they suggest roosters or women—notice the stairway of hair that sends you racing around his 1933 portrait of Margit Pogany, or the way two spiral steps at the foot of "The Sorceress" (1916-24) give the rest of the sculpture a palpable twirl. There is a dizzying feeling of being turned toward and away from, addressed only to be ignored.

This, finally, is Brancusi's gorgeous taunt. His sculptures can't be caught, only waved to as they soar grinningly by. They are gracious but better than you, whoever you are. At the Pompidou, the feeling climaxes in that bright gallery of birds, which rise to greet museumgoers before settling in for their long journey skyward. Emblems of modernism for close to a century, they make modernity seem almost lush in its efficiencies, lofty but still down-to-earth, A and not-A in the same suave breath. Real modernity can't measure up to this, of course, any more than my laptop can rival a Brancusi's elegance, but that only makes the fantasy more attractive. It hasn't dated because it hasn't come true, and won't. ♦

Constabulary Notes from All Over

From a University of Michigan crime alert.

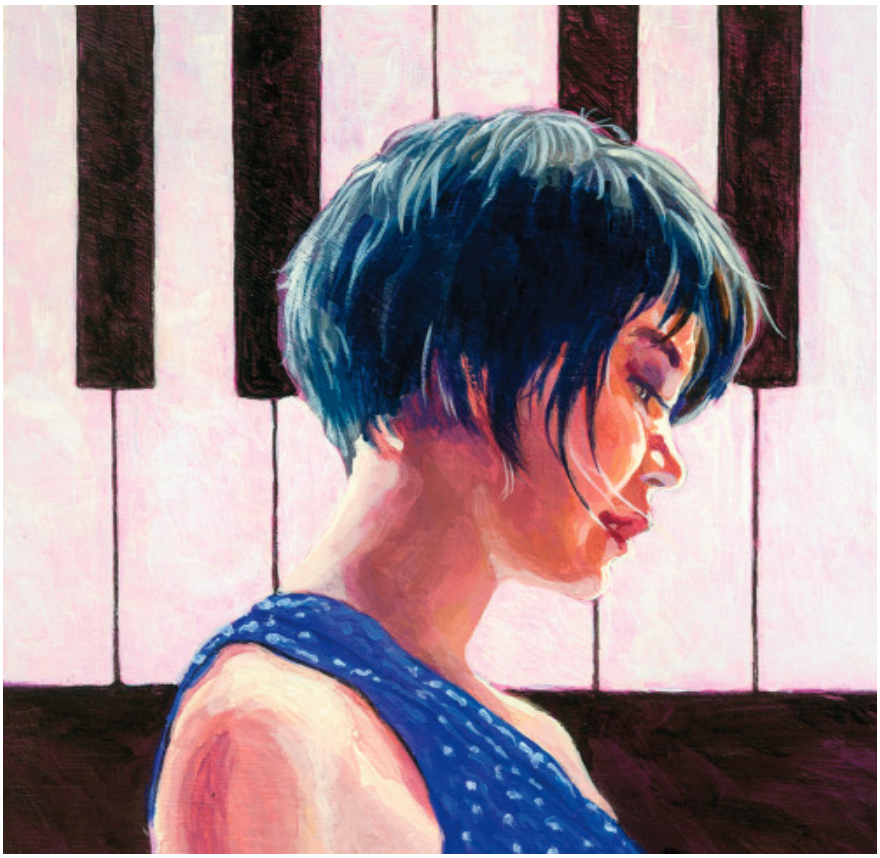
The Ann Arbor Police Department is investigating a Felonious Assault that occurred at the Target store on 231 S. State Street, on April 1, 2024, at approximately 8:40 p.m. Two individuals were walking in the door when they bumped into each other. A verbal altercation occurred, and the suspect brandished a folded pocket knife and placed it against the victim's throat. The victim pushed the suspect away, and the suspect exposed the blade. They separated, and both continued shopping before they left the store.

MUSICAL EVENTS

THOROUGHLY MODERN

Yuja Wang uses her star power to lead audiences out of their comfort zones.

BY ALEX ROSS



Wang, with her cool, analytical manner, plays Scriabin as well as anyone alive.

It has never been just about the music. The notion that performers should be faceless butlers of genius, impersonally conveying sublime messages in sound, has no basis in tradition. The bonkers antics of virtuoso pianists in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries prove otherwise. Franz Liszt, whose stage costumes ranged from Magyar military garb to priestly robes, would sometimes stop between pieces to chat with admirers. The infamously acerbic Hans von Bülow, while on an American tour, became so irritated at the promotional efforts of the Chickering piano company that he took out a jackknife and scraped the brand's name off the instrument. Vladimir de Pachmann once appeared at a recital holding a pair of socks; these, he claimed, had been knitted for Chopin by George Sand. And so on: the history of the piano is a history of weirdness.

Given this gaudy lineage, it is curious that any controversy should attend the thirty-seven-year-old pianist Yuja Wang, who seldom speaks during performances, presents programs of wide-ranging seriousness, and plays with flawless technique. The debate, such as it is, is confined to her taste in clothes. She favors spangly, skintight ensembles from high-end designers, such as Hervé Leger and Akris, and clomps across the stage in Christian Louboutin stilettos. The late Janet Malcolm, in a 2016 Profile of Wang for this magazine, devoted considerable space to the pianist's couture, arguing that it is less a contradiction than an accentuation of her athletic performance style: "The sense of a body set in urgent motion by musical imperatives requires that the body not be distractingly clothed."

All the same, a number of people find themselves distracted. "She'd fit much better in a night club" is one of the politer complaints to be found on Wang's Facebook page. Ironically, such concern trolling is symptomatic of the very superficiality that it purports to condemn. If you hold music to be a pure, transcendent, anti-physical medium, your attention shouldn't be meandering to a player's physique. Fortunately, most audiences recognize that Wang's fashions are an honest extension of her personality. At a recent recital at Disney Hall, in Los Angeles, each of her ensembles elicited giggly applause. (She customarily changes at intermission, as opera singers do.) What would happen if a male pianist chose to highlight his body in a similar way? Some boundaries have yet to be tested.

The flamboyance ends when Wang begins to play. At the keyboard, she is precise, dynamic, purposeful, unsentimental. Although she has drawn attention for a marathon survey of Rachmaninoff's five concertante pieces for piano and orchestra, sultry Romantic repertory isn't her strongest suit. Some of her most memorable performances have been of thornier fare: Schoenberg's Suite, Opus 25; Bartók's First Piano Concerto; Messiaen's "Turangalîla" Symphony; Ligeti's Études; John Adams's "Must the Devil Have All the Good Tunes?" It's seldom noticed how she uses her star power to lead audiences outside their comfort zones. She's a modernist in fashionista gear.

I first encountered Wang in 2004, when she participated in a master class on the Schubert piano sonatas at Carnegie Hall, under the aegis of the great Leon Fleisher. Her command of the often fiendishly difficult C-Minor Sonata was staggering; I would have been even more awestruck if I'd known that she was only seventeen. At times, though, Schubert's songfulness eluded her. Fleisher felt that she was too aggressive in her attack; she was "dive-bombing" the keyboard, he said. He wanted her to relax and breathe with the music. When, a year later, Wang played the Grieg Concerto with Neeme

SOURCE PHOTOGRAPH BY ILYA S. SAVENOK / GETTY

ILLUSTRATION BY TIANQI CHEN

Järvi and the New Jersey Symphony, that message had sunk in. The performance was as lyrically generous as it was rhythmically sharp.

Two decades on, Wang still has her dive-bombing moments. On a new Deutsche Grammophon disk, titled "The Vienna Recital," she delivers a swift, spiky reading of Beethoven's Sonata Opus 31, No. 3—one that captures the work's mischievous spirit but short-changes its dreamier moments. At Disney, her rendition of Debussy's "L'Isle Joyeuse" was brilliant to a fault: amid the impeccable swirl of notes, the piece's big, bounding tune remained somewhat hidden until the very end. "Regard de l'Esprit de Joie," the second of two excerpts from Messiaen's "Vingt Regards sur l'Enfant-Jésus," hit a peak of intensity too early, so that one felt a little pummelled by Messiaen's storm of ecstasy.

My cavils about the Disney recital pretty much end there, though. (Wang had played the same program at Carnegie two days earlier.) "Le Baiser de l'Enfant-Jésus," the first of the Messiaen selections, was an exercise in unhurried bliss, its expectant pauses as telling as its sumptuous sighs. Perhaps only Wang could have got away with opening a concert in so anti-virtuosic a manner. After "L'Isle Joyeuse," she offered a rigorous, vibrant account of the Eighth Sonata of Alexander Scriabin—a composer whose yen for continuous flux can easily exhaust the listener. Wang plays Scriabin as well as anyone alive: her cool, analytical manner is a perfect complement to his hothouse mysticism.

After intermission came Chopin's four Ballades—if not the highest summit in the piano repertory, then one of its hairier ascents. Mastering the exuberantly moody First Ballade is one of the age-old tests of conservatory training: on YouTube, you can find Wang giving an excellent, if somewhat studied, performance of it at her Curtis Institute graduation recital. The other three Ballades move beyond the familiar welter of Romantic emotion into zones of volatility and violence. The Second Ballade—which may or may not have been inspired by an Adam Mickiewicz poem about Polish maidens fleeing from Russian soldiers—begins with a pastoral siciliano in F major. Wang lingered over the passage with unaffected tenderness, giving just a twinge of emphasis to its bittersweet chromaticism. It trails off with a series of A's that, in Wang's hands, rang like a distant bell in a valley—the prelude to a brutal A-minor assault.

The shock of that shift landed even more strongly because Wang chose to play the Second Ballade first. She thus echoed the otherworldly innocence of the Messiaen "Baiser" that opened the first half. In recent years, Wang has tried to loosen up concert routines, withholding program notes and making unannounced changes in the order of works. (That practice occasioned a bizarre protest at a 2022 Disney recital: after the Beethoven, someone shouted, "Did you write that? Who wrote that?") In this case, the reordering changed one's perspective on the First Ballade: robbed of its status as a stand-alone showpiece, it became the brooding heart of a larger sonata structure. Wang, far advanced from her student days, viscerally inhabited the piece's conflicting moods and smoldering transitions.

The Fourth Ballade stages a climactic collision of extremes. It begins with seven bucolic bars in C major, which turn out to be a prelude to a mournful F minor. At the end of the initial passage comes a solitary, exposed C: Wang rendered it with a sudden coldness, signalling the transition to the minor. Such nuances of articulation are essential to persuasive Chopin playing. The oasis of C major returns just before the coda, this time reduced to five pianissimo chords. Wang struck the first of these with a dry, plain tone; then her touch softened, so that the chords subsided into a somnolent haze. After a split-second pause, the coda exploded with concussive force. These events didn't feel plotted in advance: Wang seemed lost in the music, in the best way.

Lest anyone worry that Wang abandoned her sense of fun, she traipsed back with a grab bag of encores: Arturo Márquez's Danzón No. 2, Samuel Feinberg's transcription of the third movement of Tchaikovsky's "Pathétique," Chopin's Nocturne in D-Flat, Glass's Étude No. 6, Shostakovich's Prelude and Fugue in D-Flat, and Glinka's "The Lark." Whoops resounded. Someone shouted, "Goddess!" In the end, Wang's flair for spectacle doesn't diminish her gifts; it heightens them. ♦

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THE THEATRE

OLD ENGLISH

"Player Kings," "The Cherry Orchard," and "London Tide."

BY HELEN SHAW

Ian McKellen stars as the coward-knight Falstaff.

When I was in London recently, walking down near Cheapside, north of the Thames, I went into the small museum built above the Mithraeum, an ancient site hidden twenty feet under Bloomberg's glassy European headquarters. You're often conscious in London of the place's great age, but there's nothing like visiting the remnants of a third-century temple devoted to Mithras—a bull-killing god popular with Roman centurions—to make you appreciate just how many cities lie beneath the streets. (A river, the Walbrook, once ran by the temple, though it has since been built over and lost.) Spring in London feels like a time for the new: goslings waddle in the parks, tiny daisies dot the grass. This May, however, many theatre productions were digging old, sometimes familiar things out of the sediment and reconsidering them in the city's changing light.

Sir John Falstaff is among those resurfaced treasures. He's one of Shakespeare's most beloved characters: a roguish knight and petty brigand, who befriends the young Harry, a prodigal prince sowing his wild (and criminal) oats. In "Player Kings," Robert Icke's nearly four-hour adaptation of Shakespeare's two "Henry IV" history plays, at the West End's Noël Coward Theatre, Ian McKellen—himself a mischievous theatrical god—takes up the character's traditional fake belly and air of ribald delight. To reëxamine him, Icke places Falstaff and his medieval milieu in a recognizable now: when Harry (Toheeb Jimoh) and a backstreet buddy go on a spree, they cut apart an A.T.M., sending sparks from their metal grinder across the dark.

Harry's father, Henry IV (Richard Coyle, snapping like a cornered fox), has come to rather hate his wayward heir. He not so secretly prefers the rebel Hotspur (Samuel Edward-Cook), who is, at least, applying himself. But is Harry really so debauched, or is he playing some deep public-relations game? Icke excels at textual archeology—his "Hamlet," from 2017, incorporated a scene from a corrupted pre-first-folio edition known, thrillingly, as the "bad quarto"—and here he has cleverly compressed Shakespeare's "Henry IV" dyad, splicing together Elizabethan variants, making subtle adjustments, and interpolating lines from "Henry V." He has also shaped the evening around McKellen's coward-knight, slowing the action when unease flickers around the old man's mouth, as Harry's pranks reveal his cruel nature, then speeding the civil-war plot along to reveal the self-interested Falstaff bustling about in the historical margins.

Icke's ochre-and-shadow production, a series of shifting brick rooms (designed by Hildegard Bechtler) warmed by occasional firelight, superimposes two worlds: Henry IV's court and Falstaff's disreputable tavern, in Eastcheap. Despite the constant pleasures of "Player Kings," its spotlight is on Shakespeare's cynicism: high or low, everyone's a crook. Even Henry IV is a usurper, ashamed of his backstabbing path to power. Icke's innovative staging makes the young prince's double inheritance from his two father figures explicit. When Harry faces Hotspur on the battlefield, he beats the better warrior with a trick that he must have picked up in Eastcheap. What would stop him? Honor? Falstaff knows what that's worth: "Can honor set a leg? no/or an arm? no." So Harry's sneaky knife goes in (quick quick quick)—and, lo, a king draws it out.

McKellen is eighty-five this month, and he seems to be aging through the great roles in random order: his rumbustious, knowing Falstaff comes long

ILLUSTRATION BY KEITH NEGLEY

after the first time McKellen played King Lear, as a mere lad of sixty-eight; he played Hamlet in 1971—and also last year. Age has given him bright new tools for performance. At one point, Falstaff kneels before Harry and then staggers upon rising. I saw McKellen massage his knee. It was only several scenes later, as the limp developed into a saucy bit of stage business, that I realized I had been taken in. Our protective feelings for McKellen the actor have been put in service of the play's pity for "sweet Jack Falstaff," whom Harry will inevitably spurn, breaking his overtaxed, unworthy, lovable old heart. It also, in a sly way, makes us complicit: despite knowing everything, we forgive a bad man.

Benedict Andrews, another director who writes his own adaptations, has been largely celebrated for his modern take on Chekhov's "Cherry Orchard," which is set, in the round, on russet rugs that extend up the walls of the relatively tiny Donmar Warehouse. Andrews likes an abrasive edge: his "Three Sisters," from 2012, featured a headbanging Nirvana needle drop; here, characters shout "you're nuthin' but a fuckwit" as an onstage drummer thrashes her cymbals. I loved its Armageddon vibe, but this "Cherry Orchard" is not always crowd-pleasing—the night I saw it, both of my bench mates left at intermission. There's a risk in keeping your audience close and well lit. You can see a lot of unconvinced expressions when, for instance, a character once described by Chekhov as "a suave man" reels in chugging vodka straight from the bottle. Chekhov's familiar, slow-burning story of an aristocrat, Liubov Ranevskaya (Nina Hoss), who lets her patrimony drift into the hands of her neighbor, the nouveau-riche Lopakhin (Adeel Akhtar), has been changed, on purpose, into something more violent, even ugly.

Still, this "Cherry Orchard" is graceful—if not in its language then in its dramatic swiftness. Andrews has his cast sit around the stage with the rest of us, so that they can fling themselves into scenes without making an entrance. The incredible fleetness and proximity, more than anything, convey what the director has extracted from Chekhov: the nauseating sensation of watching a whole society, of which we are a reluctant part, stumbling headlong into ruin.

I hope that "Player Kings" comes to New York with McKellen—it's a stunner—and I would love to see this "Cherry Orchard" unleashed on our own easily startled audiences. I'm less eager for "London Tide," another theatrical reappraisal of a cultural artifact, to make the journey. A musical adaptation of Charles Dickens's serial novel "Our Mutual Friend," now at the National, the show was written by Ben Power, with goth-folk music and songs composed by PJ Harvey. Its quality is bizarrely variable, including both unforgettable stage imagery and, occasionally, risible awkwardness.

Power, who also adapted Stefano Massini's "Lehman Trilogy" for the stage, turns almost completely away from the novel's own social dudgeon. What remains, once he cuts Dickens's satirized rich and his dying poor, are two intricate romantic plots: a man, John (Tom Mothersdale), who fakes his own death, wondering if his arranged bride, Bella (Bella Maclean), will love him without his money, and a Thames riverman's daughter, Lizzie (Ami Tredrea), who has attracted one deranged suitor (Scott Karim) and one sweet (Jamael Westman), much to the amusement of her friend Jenny Wren (Ellie-May Sheridan, giving the production's standout performance).

Power's touch with these stories is very tender, the line-by-line writing is often elegant and tart, and Harvey's underscoring is beautiful, but the show would be better off without the songs, which can sound lugubrious and interchangeable. So many of Power and Harvey's lyrics are about London—first "This is a story about London," then later "London is not England/England is not London," and later still "London is our home"—that it becomes a little goofy. The director Ian Rickson, the set designer Bunny Christie, and the lighting designer Jack Knowles, though, have made a production so gorgeous that it could almost go on tour alone, without the accompanying musical. The National's huge Lyttelton stage surges, black and shining, tilting and rising under the actors' feet. Above them, long rows of lights move in ripples; the whole theatre seems to be on a raft, subject to the wakes and tides of the Thames. This set—just synchronized light rails and a backdrop of what appears to be cheap plastic—creates one of the most impressive stage illusions I've ever seen. "I feel a little seasick," someone behind me said, as intermission started. But I had been in London for a few days, and I had started to feel at home on the river. ♦

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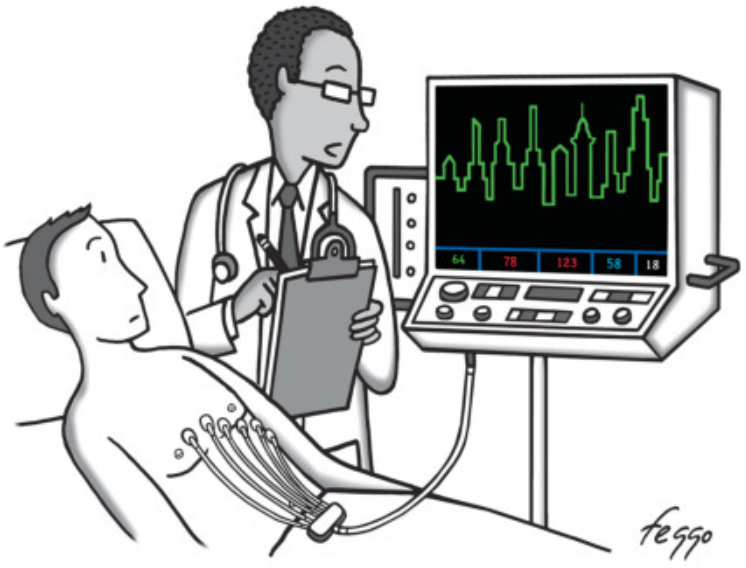
PLEASE RECYCLE THIS MAGAZINE

CARTOON CAPTION CONTEST

Each week, we provide a cartoon in need of a caption. You, the reader, submit a caption, we choose three finalists, and you vote for your favorite. Caption submissions for this week's cartoon, by Felipe Galindo, must be received by Sunday, June 2nd. The finalists in the May 20th contest appear below. We will announce the winner, and the finalists in this week's contest, in the June 17th issue. Anyone age thirteen or older can enter or vote. To do so, and to read the complete rules, visit contest.newyorker.com.

THIS WEEK'S CONTEST



“ ”

THE FINALISTS

“Well, I'm never picking up loose change again.”
Michael Lord, South Duxbury, Vt.

“Should we tell him about A.T.M.s?”
Alan Shoemaker, Centerville, Mass.

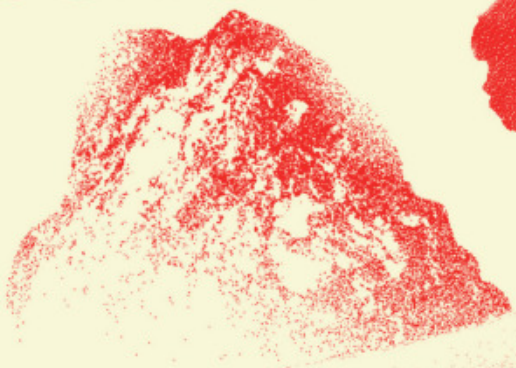
“My family used to have one, but we lost interest.”
Bob Shiffrar, Boston, Mass.

THE WINNING CAPTION

“Oh, sure, now you look at a map.”
Nick Heer, Calgary, Alberta

Pitchfork Music Festival Chicago

JULY 19-21
UNION PARK



FRIDAY, JULY 19

BLACK PUMAS

JAI PAUL · 100 GECS

JEFF ROSENSTOCK • YAEJI • SUDAN ARCHIVES • AMEN DUNES
BILLY WOODS & KENNY SEGAL • TKAY MAIDZA • DOSS • ML BUCH
ROSALI • ANGRY BLACKMEN • BLACK DUCK

SATURDAY, JULY 20

JAMIE XX

CARLY RAE JEPSEN · JESSIE WARE

DE LA SOUL • UNWOUND • BRATMOBILE • WEDNESDAY
WATER FROM YOUR EYES • SWEEPING PROMISES • FEEBLE LITTLE HORSE
HOTLINE TNT • KARA JACKSON • L'RAIN • LIFEGUARD

SUNDAY, JULY 21

ALANIS MORISSETTE

BRITTANY HOWARD · MUNA

GRANDMASTER FLASH • LES SAVY FAV • CRUMB • JESSICA PRATT
MANNEQUIN PUSSY • HAILU MERGIA • MODEL/ACTRIZ
NALA SINEPHRO • MAXO • JOANNA STERNBERG • AKENYA

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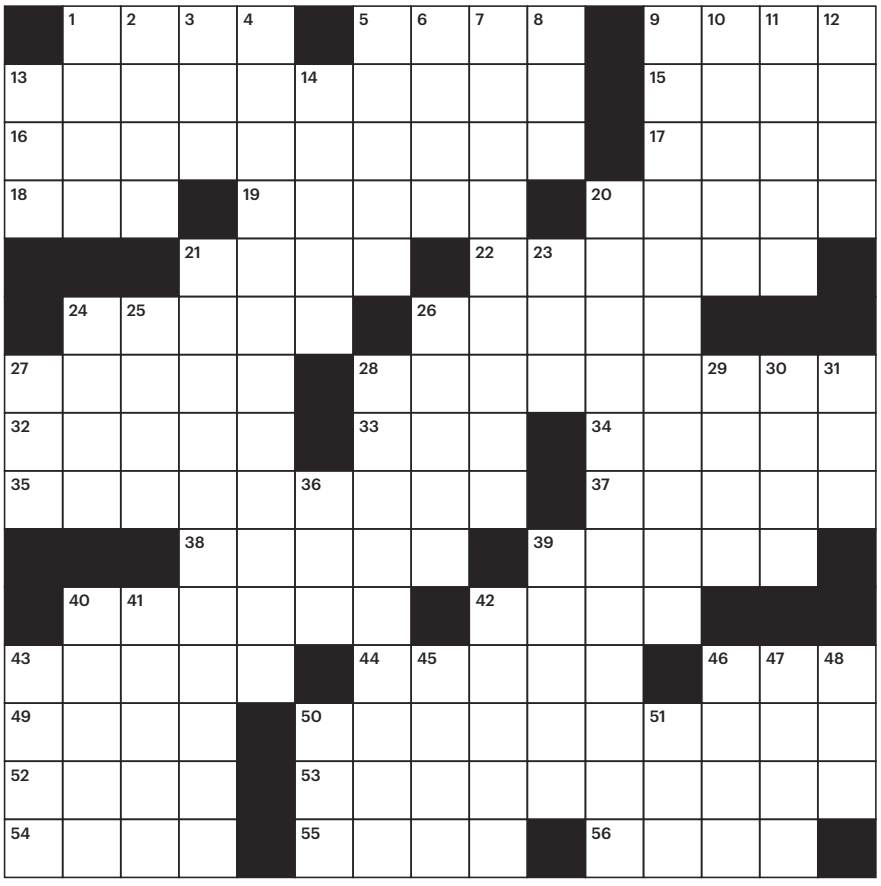
THE CROSSWORD

A moderately challenging puzzle.

BY BROOKE HUSIC



ACROSS

1 Snowman's arm, perhaps
5 Word after small or all
9 Bounces gently on the water
13 2021 film based on the work of Haruki Murakami
15 Magazine whose name is a pronoun
16 "Like you wouldn't believe!"
17 "The Autobiography of Malcolm X" collaborator Haley
18 "Bessie" co-writer and director Rees
19 Specks in the sea
20 Momentary sparkle
21 Pre- relative
22 "salt." poet Nayyirah
24 Round that eliminates two teams
26 Tasks on a list
27 Meal during which the Four Questions are asked
28 Zigzagging moves whose popularity overseas spread to the N.B.A.
32 Organs with walls
33 Inc., in Britain
34 Ordeal
35 Short contests within a larger competition, as in Mario Party
37 Multimedia artist ___ Red Star
38 Bailey who forms half of an R. & B. duo with her sister Halle
39 Coverage
40 Is rough on the ears
42 Café au ___
43 ___ Day of Visibility (March 31st)
44 Part of a Miss Piggy costume
46 Single exercise
49 Emulate a siren
50 Strategy for guarding a guard, perhaps
52 Spongy rice-and-lentil cake sometimes drizzled with ghee
53 Housemates that hardly ever go out?
54 What an ovenbird makes on the forest floor
55 Forever
56 Bits of bubbly?

DOWN

1 The Great Banyan, for one
2 What allows some headbands to keep their shape
3 ___ leaf (symbol of the sorority Alpha Kappa Alpha)
4 2022 Steve Lacy album that alludes to his late-May birthday
5 Go around and around
6 Feel longing
7 They often contain letters you don't want anyone else to read
8 Full-house initials
9 Memphis stretch known for blues music
10 Basic skateboarding trick
11 Mixture
12 Write some fantasy?
13 VHS replacement
14 Requirements
20 Mystery authors?
21 Course that might cover "Paradise" and "This Side of Paradise," for short
23 "Much ___ About Nothing"
24 Org. that asks if we're alone
25 Site of a Biblical eviction
26 Student who may have a personalized learning plan
27 Difference's opposite
28 "Sesame Street" standard that Lil Nas X once co-performed on "The Not-Too-Late Show"
29 It comes before *zwei*
30 Nursing-bra inserts
31 Conniving
36 Lager alternative
39 São ___, Brazil
40 Number that might be affected by inflation
41 Structures that urban skiers grind
42 Gray wolves
43 ___ paradox (thought experiment in which a high-speed traveller appears to age differently from someone on Earth)
45 Ready to enter a textile-free sauna
46 Escape into a book
47 Nourishes oneself
48 Periodic occurrence, for short?
50 ___ de la Bandera (February observance in Mexico)
51 School such as Navajo Tech or I.A.I.A.

Solution to the previous puzzle:

■	D	O	N	T	S	T	O	P	■	S	T	R	A	P
M	I	N	I	A	T	U	R	E	■	P	E	E	V	E
S	W	E	L	T	E	R	E	D	■	A	N	G	E	R
N	A	W	■	A	P	E	S	■	A	C	O	R	N	S
B	L	A	B	■	■	■	■	P	I	E	R	O	G	I
C	I	T	Y	P	R	O	P	E	R	■	S	U	E	S
■	■	T	E	L	E	P	A	T	H	Y	■	P	S	T
■	■	S	U	P	E	R	C	O	O	L	■	■	■	■
P	C	S	■	S	A	N	T	A	S	U	I	T	■	■
R	O	A	M	■	S	I	S	T	E	R	S	O	N	G
E	L	L	I	O	T	T	■	■	■	■	T	O	O	L
P	O	I	N	T	S	■	S	S	N	S	■	L	O	U
A	G	E	N	T	■	C	H	E	A	T	C	O	D	E
I	N	N	I	E	■	C	E	R	T	A	I	N	L	Y
D	E	T	E	R	■	S	A	B	O	T	A	G	E	■

Find more puzzles and this week's solution at **newyorker.com/crossword**

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THE OUTER SEYCHELLES

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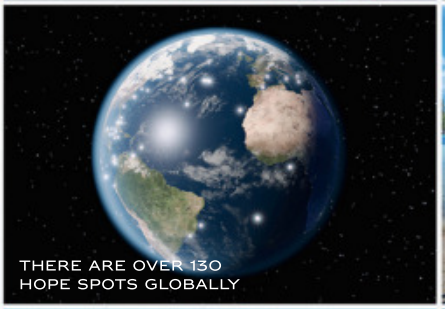
FLORIDA GULF COASTLINE, UNITED STATES

SYLVIA EARLE EXPLORES
COCOS ISLAND, COSTA RICA


THERE ARE OVER 130
HOPE SPOTS GLOBALLY

SYLVIA EARLE WITH VOLUNTEERS,
THE OUTER SEYCHELLES

GREAT BARRIER REEF, AUSTRALIA

MOBULA RAYS, AZORES
ARCHIPELAGO, PORTUGAL

SEA LION,
GALÁPAGOS,
ECUADOR

MISSION BLUE

ON OUR WATCH

Hope can now be spotted across all our planet's seas and oceans. Sites are made into aquatic havens by local communities, to safeguard the richness and diversity of the ecosystems they depend on. Sylvia Earle's invaluable experience as an explorer and marine biologist continues to help further their goal, through her organization, Mission Blue. Together, they have created over 130 Hope Spots and counting. Carrying a message of hope for generations to come. It is that vision, that dedication to a perpetual planet, which we are proud to stand by. **For as long as it is needed.**

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